

Edited by Peter Haining

THE BLACK MAGIC OMNIBUS

Volume 2



Peter Haining is a well-known writer and broadcaster on the supernatural and the occult. The editor of numerous collections of macabre stories, he has also written four studies of witchcraft and black magic. He is a full-time writer, is married with two children, and lives in Essex.

Also edited by Peter Haining:

THE GHOULS 1

THE GHOULS 2

BLACK MAGIC 1

For my brother ROBERT
– who also likes such stories

Edited by Peter Haining

Black Magic 2

Epilogue by Ray Bradbury

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An Orbit Book

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Part II

INTRODUCTION

That black magic still flourishes and is practised in many parts of the world is common knowledge even to the most cursory newspaper reader or television viewer. Undeniably sensationalized—and often confused with other quite different practices—its dedicated propagation of 'evil for Evil's sake' makes it one of the most sinister forces at work in our modern society. That we should still be so attracted to it, however, is only a natural extension of the fascination that it has exerted over mankind for centuries.

In this second section of *The Black Magic Omnibus* there are stories and reports from the major centres of the world where the practice, in its varying forms, is going on at this very moment. All the items tend to underline the timeless nature of the black arts and the determination with which they are pursued despite all the great dangers. The tales included here are not traditional re-statements of what different societies consider to be black magic; like the earlier stories in Part I, they are rather re-interpretations—and even explanations—of elements of the practice made in the light of the latest knowledge and study. Many of the authors represented are experts in this field—particularly in their own countries—and all bring personal experience to bear in their stories. The only change in the book's pattern is that here the contributions are preceded by newspaper and magazine quotations—rather than extracts from classic books and documents—to point up the immediacy of the stories.

Robert Graves, who begins the collection, is perhaps the most important modern novelist in the field of mythology and the supernatural; he played a very large part in helping to define the true nature of witchcraft after centuries of fear and suspicion. Along with the renowned scholar, Dr. Margaret Murray, he demonstrated witchcraft to be a survival of the ancient fertility cult of *Wicca* which predated Christianity and honoured the gods of nature. In his story *An Appointment for Candlemass*, making its first anthology

appearance here, he expounds his belief and evocatively recreates the atmosphere which for centuries has bracketed witchcraft with black magic in an alliance of the unholy and the unnameable.

Wicca was the ancient fertility religion of Europe and it is no surprise to find that elements of it were carried to the New World by the pioneer settlers. Here it formed with other ancient beliefs the art of the *Hexerei*, whose practitioners are to be found in the Pennsylvania and New England areas. These people practise a form of country magic, with both 'black' and 'white' elements, which has given rise to several strange deaths and no small number of spells and castings. The handbook of the practice is *The Long Lost Friend* (or *Der Langverborgene Freund*, to give it its original title) which, according to one description, is a 'mishmash of original material, ancient Egyptian medicine, German folklore, sorcery, gypsy magic, palliatives from the British Isles, "wisdom" from the Hebrew cabbala and the transcendentalism of Albert Magnus.' Samuel M. Clawson, a native Pennsylvanian, grew up in the ambiance of the Hexers and recreates this superbly in *Double Hex*.

Gaston Leroux, who wrote *Letters of Fire*, the story of Satan in France, is perhaps best known as the author of that horror classic *The Phantom of the Opera*. But he was also a noted expert on French occultism and wrote several essays on the subject for academic journals; his tale here of those who seek the devil's aid is surely among the very best of its kind.

Hanns Heinz Ewers, a German observer of the supernatural—and vampirism in particular—is perhaps scarcely known outside the ranks of history students, yet his novels and essays played a profound part in the formation of Nazi Germany, which as we now know was much influenced by occultism. Ewers, who began writing just before the First World War, was obsessed with rediscovering the old Nordic magic, and his stories 'contained all the dark shapeless mysticism and exultation of Teutonic blood rites that were to become so dear to the ideologists of the Nazi order,' to quote critic Gabriel Ronay. In such books as *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* and *The Vampire* he exemplified many of the horrifying ideas which Hitler so enthusiastically embraced; yet when the Fuehrer came to power, Ewers found himself proscribed and his works banned from German libraries. The Nazi destruction of his work contributed much to his present obscurity, but, while his motives are certainly not above question, his importance in this field of literature is undeniable.

The Russian Feodor Sologub has been called by his English translator, John Cournos, 'a mystic of the Russian tradition.' He, too, is not as well known as he deserves to be, and has rightly been referred to as 'a compound of Chekhov and Poe.' Such stories as *The Little Demon* and *The Created Legend* are excellent examples of his skill—as is *Invoker of the Beast*, which Cournos describes as 'a story of reincarnation . . . a masterpiece of mystery.'

The African witchcraft tradition is as old as the land itself, and almost as difficult to fathom. William Sambrot, the distinguished American travel writer and fantasist, has written an unusual story of confrontation between the old beliefs and the intruding white man in *Night of the Leopard*, which I found among the most objective of the many hundreds of stories written about the 'dark side' of that great continent. Brazil—and South America in general—also has an ancient magical tradition, and there is probably no better writer to describe it than Jorge Luis Borges.

William Seabrook, an American explorer and adventurer, encountered magic in many corners of the world, and witnessed innumerable strange rites and ceremonies which he recorded in his books. I doubt, though, whether he ever told a more chilling story than that of *The Wedding Guests*, which is about the power of voodoo in the West Indies. A story by Avram Davidson, *The Power of Every Root*, about the *curanderos* of Mexico, then brings us back full circle to America again.

The latter half of this section is taken up with various forms of black and 'off-white' magic in America and Britain. Richard Matheson, with his *By Appointment Only*, leads us naturally into this part with a look at the way even the oldest forms of superstition introduced by immigrants can still work effectively in big cities. Then MacKinlay Kantor, one of the most important authors of our time, delves into his rural upbringing for *The Witch Doctor of Rosy Ridge*, where he says, 'there were plenty of old witch grannies decorating my childhood—pioneer folks who remembered well the recipes for early-day lotions and potions.' His tale is marvellously complemented by Joan Fleming's *Writer's Witch*, about the kind of supernatural powers still at work in Britain's rural districts. Larry Harris takes us back into the city to blend a little magic with social work, while Gordon MacCreagh provides one of the best short stories I have ever come across about that much-in-the-news figure, the exorcist.

To conclude, Ray Bradbury, the master of modern fantasy, provides an *Epilogue* in which he takes another look at a film which has brought home the realities of Satanism to a far wider audience than any other work: *Rosemary's Baby*. Bradbury believes the film might

have had a more stunning impact with a different ending, and outlines just that in his essay. It is a thought-provoking and memorable idea and one which I think most suitably ends this collection of black magic stories.

P.H.

THE CULT OF WICCA

'Witchcraft was, and still is, a remnant of the old pagan religion which survived the coming of Christianity, and although its adherents might be of any class of society, they were mostly drawn from the peasant population of outlying districts. These people lived close to the earth and their livelihood depended on the fertility of animals and crops. Hence they continued to do what they had been doing from time immemorial—namely to follow a religion of nature and the fertility thereof, and to hold regular festivals at which the concept of cosmic fertility was worshipped, and the attempt was made to induce it by ritual to manifest itself upon earth.'

The priests and priestesses who directed these festivals were called the Wicca, meaning 'The Wise Ones,' and they also fulfilled the function of surgeons, doctors, midwives and psychiatrists. It was these people and their followers who came to be called "witches." The Church found their influence a dangerous rival to its own, and commenced a campaign of extermination against them, the barbarities of which are not pleasant to dwell upon. Its result was to drive the Wicca underground where the cult survived as a secret "mystery-religion." In a fragmentary form it survives to this day, and I have been initiated into a British witch coven. In fact most witches were (and are) quite ordinary people who happen to prefer another and older religion to Christianity, and to be obstinate in their choice.'

GERALD GARDNER,

The Observer, December 1956

An Appointment for Candlemass

ROBERT GRAVES

Have I the honour of addressing Mrs. Hipkinson?

That's me! And what can I do for you, young man?

I have a verbal introduction from—from an officer of your organization. Robin of Barking Creek was the name he gave.

If that isn't just like Robin's cheek! The old buck hasn't even dropped me a Christmas card since the year sweets came off the ration, and now he sends me trouble.

Trouble, Mrs. Hipkinson?

Trouble, I said. You're not one of us. Don't need to do no crystal-gazing to see that. What's the game?

Robin of Barking Creek has been kind enough to suggest that you would be kind enough to . . .

Cut it out. Got my shopping to finish.

If I might perhaps be allowed to carry your basket? It looks as if it were rather heavy.

O.K., you win. Take the damn thing. My corns are giving me gyp. Well, now, out with it!

The fact is, madam, I'm engaged in writing a D.Phil. thesis on Contemporary Magology. . . .

Eh? What's that? Talk straight, if you please!

Excuse me. I mean I'm a University graduate studying present-day witchcraft; as a means of taking my degree in Philosophy.

Now, that makes a bit more sense. If Robin answers for you, I don't see why we couldn't help—same as I got our Deanna up into O level with a bit of a spell I cast on the Modern School examiners. But don't trouble to speak in whispers. Them eighteenth-century Witchcrafts Acts is obsolescent now, except as regards fortune-tellers; and we don't touch that lay, not professionally we don't. 'Course, I admit, we keep ourselves to ourselves, but so do the Masons and the Foresters and the Buffs, not to mention the

Commies. And all are welcome to our little do's, what consent to be duly pricked in their finger-tips and take the oath and given that there comical kiss. The police don't interfere. Got their work cut out to keep up with motoring offences and juvenile crime, and cetera. No they don't believe in witches, they say; only in fairies. They're real down on the poor fairies, these days.

Do you mean to say the police wouldn't break up one of your Grand Sabbaths, if . . .

Half a mo'! Got to pop into the Home and Commercial for a dozen rashers and a couple of hen-fruit. Bring the basket along, ducks, if you please. . . .

As you were saying, Mrs. Hipkinson?

Ah yes, about them Sabbaths . . . Well, see, so's to keep on the right side of the Law, on account we all have to appear starko, naturally we hire the Nudists' Hall. Main festivals are quarter-days and cross quarter-days; them's the obligatory ones, same as in Lancashire and the Highlands and everywhere else. Can't often spare the time in between. We run two covens here, used to be three—mixed sexes, but us girls are in the big majority. I'm Pucelle of Coven No. 1, and my boy-friend Arthur o'Bower (radio mechanic in private life), he's Chief Devil of both. My husband plays the tabor and jew's-trump in Coven No. 2. Not very well up in the book of words, but a willing performer, that's Mr. H.

I hope I'm not being indiscreet, but how do you name your God of the Witches?

Well, we used different names in the old days, before this village became what's called a dormitory suburb. He was Mahew, or Lug, or Herne, I seem to remember, according to the time of year. But the Rev. Jones, our last Chief Devil but two, he was a bit of a scholar: always called the god 'Faunus,' which is Greek or Hebrew, I understand.

But Faunus was a patron of flocks and forests. There aren't many flocks or forests in North-Eastern London, surely?

Too true, there aren't; but we perform our fertility rites in aid of the allotments. We all feel that the allotments is a good cause to be encouraged, remembering how short of food we went in the War: Reminds me, got to stop at that fruit stall: horse-radish and a cabbage lettuce and a few nice carrots. The horse-radish is for my little old familiar; too strong for my own taste. . . . Shopping's a lot easier since Arthur and me got rid of that there Hitler . . .

Please continue, Mrs. Hipkinson.

Well, as I was saying, that Hitler caused us a lot of trouble. We don't hold with politics as a rule, but them Natsies was just too

bad with their incendiaries and buzz-bombs. So Arthur and I worked on him at a distance, using all the strongest enchantments in the *Book of Moons* and out of it, not to mention a couple of new ones I got out of them Free French Breton sailors. But Mr. Hitler was a difficult nut to crack. He was *protected*, see? But Mr. Hitler had given us fire, and fire we would give Mr. Hitler. First time, unfortunately, we got a couple o' words wrong in the formula, and only blew his pants off him. Next time, we didn't slip up; and we burned the little basket to a cinder. . . . Reminds me of my great-grandmother, old Mrs. Lou Simmons of Wanstead. She got mad with the Emperor Napoleon Bonapart, and caused 'im a horrid belly-ache on the Field of Waterloo. Done, at a distance again, with toad's venom—you got to get a toad scared sick before he'll secrete the right stuff. But old Lou, she scared her toad good and proper: showed him a distorting looking-glass—clever act, eh? So Boney couldn't keep his mind on the battle; it was those awful gripings in his stomjack what gave the Duke of Wellington his opportunity. Must cross over to the chemist, if you don't mind. . . .

For flying ointment, by any chance?

Don't be potty! Think I'd ask that Mr Cadman for soot and baby's fat and bat's blood and aconite and water-parsnip? The old carcase would think I was pulling his leg. No, Long Jack, of Coven No. 2 makes up our flying ointment—Jack's assistant-dispenser at the Children's Hospital down New Cut. Oh, but look at that queue! I don't think I'll trouble this morning. An aspirin will do me just as well as the panel medicine.

Do you still use the old-style besom at your merrymakings, Mrs. Hipkinson?

There's another difficulty you laid your finger on. Can't get a decent besom hereabouts, not for love nor money. Painted white wood and artificial bristles, that's what they offer you. We got to send all the way to a bloke at Taunton for the real thing—ash and birch with osier for the binding—and last time, believe it or don't, the damned fool sent me a consignment bound in nylon tape! Nylon tape, I ask you!

Yes, I fear that modern technological conditions are not favourable to a spread of the Old Religion.

Can't grumble. We're up to strength at present, until one or two of the older boys and girls drop off the hook. But TV isn't doing us no good. Sometimes I got to do a bit of magic-making before I can drag my coven away from that Children's Hour.

Could you tell me what sort of magic?

Oh, nothing much; just done with tallow dolls and a bit of

itching powder. I raise shingles on their sit-upons, that's the principle. Main trouble is, there's not been a girl of school-age joined us since my Deanna, which is quite a time. It's hell beating up recruits. Why, I know families where there's three generations of witches behind the kids, and can you guess what they all say?

I should not like to venture a guess, Mrs. Hipkinson.

They say it's *rude*. *Rude!* That's a good one, eh? Well now, what about Candlemass? Falls on a Saturday this year. Come along at dusk. Nudists' Hall, remember—first big building to the left past the traffic lights. Just knock. And don't you worry about the finger-pricking. I'll bring iodine and lint.

This is very kind of you indeed, Mrs. Hipkinson. I'll phone Barkington Creek tonight and tell Robin how helpful you have been.

Don't mention it, young man. Well, here's my dump. Can't ask you in, I'm afraid, on account of my old familiar wouldn't probably take to you. But it's been a nice chat. O.K., then. On Candlemass Eve, look out for three green frogs in your shaving mug; I'll send them as a reminder . . . And mind, no funny business, Mister Clever! We welcome good sports, specially the college type like yourself; but nosy-parkers has got to watch their step, see? Last Lammas, Arthur and me caught a reporter from the *North-Eastern Examiner* concealed about the premises. *Hey presto!* and we transformed him into one of the Australian yellow dog dingoes. Took him down to Regent's Park in Arthur's van, we did, and let him loose on the grass. Made out he'd escaped from the Zoological Gardens; the keepers soon copped him. He's the only dingo in the pen with a kink in his tail; but you'd pick him out even without that, I dare say, by his hang-dog look. Yes, you can watch the dingoes free from the 'Scotsman's Zoo,' meaning that nice walk along the Park railings. Well, cheerio for the present!

Goodbye, Mrs. Hipkinson.

THE AMERICAN HEXERS

There are hundreds of stories about hexerei which is still practised in Pennsylvania. It is a branch of witchcraft that is carried on particularly in the south-east, below the Blue Mountains. It is prevalent wherever the inhabitants are of "Dutch" (German) descent: York, Lebanon, Lancaster, Allentown, Reading, Bethlehem; and in many rural areas; Red Lion, Paradise, Perkiomenville, Bird-in-hand, Manheim, Strasburg, Ephrata, to name but a few.

Driving through this region one sees many "hex" signs, usually circular and with interesting designs, on farms, barns, silos and outbuildings. Actually the signs are anti-hex, or counter-hex talismans; precautions against being hexed.

"Hex," explains Dr. Otto Freiburg, an ethnologist and expert on hexerei "is the Americanization of the German word, hexe. Until about the fourteenth century it was applied only to the devils, demons and other evil spirits believed to kidnap and eat infants and small children. Then, gradually, it was expanded to include human beings who were thought to possess supernatural powers: witches and warlocks who were also called powwowers or brauchers when hex came to Pennsylvania with German immigrants some two centuries ago.

"Hexing differs somewhat from other kinds of witchcraft in that most powwowers, both male and female, are professionals whose knowledge of white or black magic is inherited. You don't find many amateurs dabbling in hexerei, as in other branches of witchcraft, nor do the professionals form covens. It isn't fun and games stuff, but is taken seriously. I'd estimate, for example, that even in this day and age at least sixty per cent of the people who live in York County believe in hexerei."

*New York Times,
October 1970*

Double Hex

SAMUEL M. CLAWSON

High summer in the Pennsylvania foothills often brings an oppressive humidity even in the coolest hours. It was already stuffy in the little bedroom under the eaves where Amanda Spiegell crouched in the light of a guttered candle, waiting for the dawn to make the cock crow. He was in a slatted box on the roof of the kitchen shed where he could see the low rise of Gobbler's hill to the east of Hummerstown.

She listened intently for any sound of her brother, Reuben, stirring in the second-floor bedroom directly beneath. If he guessed the cock was there, he'd surely know that she meant to strike at dawn when the tide of life is at full ebb, and he'd lay the cock still with his hex spell. The message in the tea leaves had been clear enough. A death in the family before the dark of the moon was done. There were only her and Reuben locked in the dark battle of hex and spell. The stark pattern in the bottom of the divining cup had warned her that the climax was at hand.

A faint greyness relieved the dead black at the window pane at the foot of her bed. The window was raised several inches at the bottom and the soft shuffle of spreading wings against the sides of the cage came to her ears. She crouched lower, bending over the floor. Her forefingers darted downward and inscribed an intricate sign as the cock began the first discordant notes of his call.

'Oh, brother, devil brother,' she spat out the words. 'Fade, pale, choke, smother. Fall, crawl, lie, die.'

A muffled snort from the bedroom below interrupted the last notes of the cock's crow. Amanda remained bent over, listening. She gasped with delight when a thumping crash shook the old structure of the house. Then, as she half rose from her cramped position, knife-like pain stabbed into her back.

The sound she made was an animal compound of surprise and

fury. She knew that somehow he had made a doll with a part of her in it. Not finger or toe clippings—she was careful about that. Perhaps a hair or two had escaped from the tight fitting house cap she always wore. There was nothing to be done now. Admitting receipt of a hex-blow only strengthened it tenfold. The knife-like pain had only been a cramp from bending over so long. She formed the thought as her defence, wishing grimly that she could believe it. Go down and fix his breakfast. Of course he carried the doll with him. No use looking for it. She had to crush him before he could use it again.

She pulled the stiff black skirt down over her ample hips, hurried into the blouse and tugged the comb through her iron-grey hair. Reuben's bedroom door was open when she came down the steps from the third floor and passed along the hallway. He had turned from the mirror and was watching when she stopped in the door. She remembered when she saw the costume. It was Wednesday morning. Every Wednesday morning he tried on the long scarlet cape and ugly white headthing with the black flap and eyeholes hanging over his face. She could see his piggy eyes shining behind the black cloth.

'Four eggs, Amanda,' he said thickly through the muffling cloth. 'And get rid of that damn rooster out there, wherever he came from—made me fall over the chair.' She could hear his voice in a diminishing mutter as she went on towards the steps. She felt the old creepy feeling on the nape of her neck and supposed that he was throwing his fateful hex-chant after her. 'Aiya, aiya, simple sister. Boil, burn, break, blister.' When he was alive father had never allowed it but Reuben had always found a time and place to whisper it in her ear.

It seemed years instead of six months since they'd put father in the ground. Reuben was the man and a woman has no say. He'd sold the farm and come to town. Rented a house and taken a job in Krause's butcher shop. Built the hex fire around her by day and by night—by chant and by spell. Oh, she knew the reason why. The money from the farm and what father had left in the bank. Reuben loved money. Every bite she ate was a piece of it—she'd seen it in his eyes.

The house was a spook's hold. He claimed to like it because the blind-alley street out in front ducked between Carter's warehouse and the City Garage to let out in the Main Square. He could whip around the corner and be at his job in Krause's Market in five minutes. Or to the Lodge on the other side of the square for an evening. After supper tonight he'd go up to his room, wrap the

costume in a piece of butcher paper and go out to the lodge meeting.

She hated the house. Haunt-heavy and hex-walled. She thought of her Reuben doll, buried in the yard when it had failed her. The cat she had brought to set inside the seventh circle while she cast the death spell. He'd put the devil's horns on it with his thumb and two outside fingers. An hour later the cat had wandered out into the street in front of the house and Smeckler's grocery truck had ground the life out of him.

'Good eggs, Amanda,' Reuben looked up from his plate. 'Why don't you pull up a chair and have some?'

'You know I don't do that,' she said in a flat voice, turning from the stove and her puttering with the skillet. 'The men eat and then the women. Old custom is good enough for me.' She sniffed and went back to scraping at the bottom of the skillet. Why did he always think her a fool? He could put a sign on the egg in the shell or the flour in the bin and no matter. The fire would burn it out at cooking. He would get no chance to see her food between the cooking and the eating. Especially not now with the foot of the reaper already on the door sill.

'The trouble with you, Amanda, you're dumb as an ox,' Reuben sucked audibly at the cup of coffee and glanced at her back with a frown on his butcher's face. 'Hex is not for the likes of you so stop fooling with it. Some day you'll put the sign on yourself if you don't take care.'

'There's no money in the food jar,' she said coldly without looking around. 'Will you drop something in or bring some of Krause's horse flesh if you want to eat that.'

'We sell good meat.' He scowled at the thought of parting with money. 'Besides, I meant to tell you. We close the market for tomorrow. Krause and me are going rabbit hunting while they put the new counters in. Then you can make us a great big hasenpfeffer.'

After Reuben had gone she fried eggs and potatoes and sat at the table chewing nervously. Her eyes kept wandering to the wholesale meat company calendar on the far wall. She seldom noticed dates but yesterday she had traced the phases of the moon printed beside each day. In three more days—. She heard the front door open and turned to see Reuben standing by the clothes rack in the hallway.

'Damned rooster,' he said gruffly. 'Wondering how he got put up there on the roof and forgot my hat.'

She sat stiffly in the chair until the front door slammed then lifted a forkful of egg toward her mouth. Suddenly she drew in a

harsh gasping breath. He'd seen the food. Of course the hex was on it. It must be that he too knew the time was near. Wily as a fox—he had almost trapped her. She snatched up the plate, carried it to the garbage pail and scraped it off hastily.

When Amanda straightened up with the fork and plate still in her hand, her eyes were level with the calendar hanging slightly askew on the wall. Odd, she hadn't known this Wednesday was a red-letter holiday. Realization drenched her with the icy shock of startled fear. It was last month's sheet she was seeing. Her hand rose slowly and lifted the old sheet. The plate slipped from her other hand and shattered on the floor. No wonder he had come back. The new moon was due tonight. This was the day of the reaper forecast in the divining cup.

After the dishes were done she went upstairs to make the beds, her mind hunting wildly for a plan. When she pushed Reuben's door open her eyes went first to the table at the foot of the rumpled bed. It was a plain table with a lamp, an ashtray, and a rack of pipes. She had crocheted the large doily in the middle of the table. The hex sign was worked into it so cleverly that you could only see it by holding the doily up to the light. Sometimes he brushed the doily aside or left it carelessly tossed in the easy chair beside the table where he liked to sit and read. She always put it back to the sign of the devil's horns pointed up across the bed.

This morning the .22 rifle which usually hung on the wall above the bed was lying across the doily. The rifle was freshly oiled. The cleaning rod was leaning against the table and a box of cartridges spilled open beside the rifle. She looked along the barrel and saw that it pointed at Reuben's picture on the bureau. She came up to the table and reached out to lift the rifle. Then she saw that the doily was turned. She knew where the horns of the hex were by the little stitches she had dropped at the edge by each horn tip. The horns lay on each side of the rifle barrel and bracketed the picture on the bureau.

She drew her hand back without touching the rifle. It was a double sign. Strong hex and hard. She made the bed and hurried out of the room. For a while she sat in the kitchen, thinking, weighing, feeling more confident as she reviewed the lay of the hex. After a while she went back into his room and this time noticed that the rifle was loaded and the safety off. For a moment she frowned because this wasn't like Reuben. He was a careful one with a gun. Then she smiled. That was the way with hex. It changed little things—enough.

His dinner was hot in the pans when Reuben came in, at five.

Instead of going to the stove and lifting the lids, he just stood there for a minute with his face the colour of a slab of suet. Then he went up the stairs. She heard him tramping around the bedroom like a caged animal. Then he called down the stairs for her to come up.

'Get me a glass of schnapps,' he said gruffly when she came to the doorway. He was standing in front of the bureau and she could see his hands shaking all the way across the room.

'Just had a hell of an experience. Went over to Krause's house to look at his new gun. Picked the damn thing up and it went off. Clipped through my hair. That close.'

Her mind raced while she went down the stairs and poured a glass on the pantry shelf. Oh yes, devil brother. One horn has missed you but the other is loaded too. Right there on the table. She listened unconsciously for the shattering report in the room above.

'Set it down. I'll get it in a minute,' he said when she came in with the glass. 'First, unload that damn gun, will you? I just noticed, it's loaded too.'

It was like a drench of cold water full in her face. How could both horns of a perfect hex have failed? She picked up the rifle and felt the weight of it in her hands. Almost as though by plan, her finger slipped inside the trigger guard and her hand clenched hard—like she had locked fingers uselessly around the neck of the Reuben doll. This time it was different. The rifle barked and ripped back in her hands. Reuben staggered one step and fell back on the bed.

She swayed forward with the rifle still clutched in her hands. In the ruin of his face where the bullet had found him, Amanda saw victory. She knew his spirit had lifted from him and her thought went flashing to the long knife-like splinter of yew-wood hidden in the bottom of her trunk. She'd saved a gallon of rooster blood to get it from old Granny Merk. Now, drive it through his heart and seal him out of the mortal world forever. She shook her head. It wouldn't do in this case with people coming and all. Anyway, he was the dumb ox—not her. Like mortal, like spirit—he'd never find his way back. She laid the rifle on the table and went down the stairs. A few minutes later she called the police.

It was an hour later and she was rocking back and forth in the old parlour rocker. The front door was open and the place was full of them. Dean, the plain clothes Chief, the coroner, two patrol car men in uniform, and a *Herald* reporter. As usual, Dean was talking.

'Damnedest thing I ever heard of. Picked up one gun over at Krause's place and shot a furrow through his hair. Then he comes home, picks up another, and bingo. You shouldn't have picked up the gun though, Miss Spiegell,' he frowned at Amanda. 'Besides disturbing the evidence, you mighta shot yourself. The rest of the clip was still in there.'

She looked up from her hands twisted together in the folds of the apron she was wearing and saw the flash of colour in the doorway. The squat figure wrapped in the long scarlet cape, the white hooded head, and the black face mask with the little piggy eyes shining behind it.

'Reuben,' her voice shrilled in the earache range. 'Oh damn you. I should have used the splinter.' She slid down into a moaning blubber.

One of the patrol men jerked his pistol from its holster and the masked man hastily pushed his hood back and showed his face. Everyone recognized Bill Stern, the shoe shop proprietor.

'What's going on here?' Stern asked plaintively. 'I just dropped over to ask about Reuben. Saw him sitting in his chair at the meeting. He was pale as a ghost and when I looked again, he'd vanished.'

SATANISM IN FRANCE

'Neo-Satanism has been taken up by a part of the artistic-intellectual set, the spiritual grandchildren of the rebels who had been Bohemians in the 'Twenties and Communists in the 'Thirties. The neo-Satanists are mostly young people who have given up politics in despair of achieving constructive programmes in the whirl of politics and in many cases have given up art and literature, too. Their creative energies are spent on gambling with evil and on that improbable masked ball of the black mass. They take the specifics of their pageantry from mouldy books and delight in the old rites of the Middle Ages. Drugs play a major part in these gatherings—the celebrants using hashish, cocaine, laudanum, LSD, peyote, sleeping pills, Jimson weed, belladonna berries, many types of amphetamines, methedrine and synthetic mescaline. The worse the trip, it is said, the more successful it was in terms of group mores. Then, the following day, the drug-takers compare notes and argue about which of them has "gone farthest into hell." The competition is believed to be intense.'

*Le Monde,
July 1970*

In Letters of Fire

GASTON LEROUX

We had been out hunting wild boar all day, when we were overtaken by a violent storm, which compelled us to seek refuge in a deep cavern. It was Makoko, our guide, who took upon himself to give utterance to the thought which haunted the minds of the four of us who had sought safety from the fury of the tempest—Mathis, Allan, Makoko and myself.

'If the gentleman who lives in yonder house, which is said to be haunted by the devil, does not grant us the shelter of his roof tonight, we shall be compelled to sleep here.'

Hardly had he uttered the words when a strange figure appeared at the entrance to the cavern.

'It is *he!*' exclaimed Makoko, grasping my arm.

I stared at the stranger.

He was tall, lanky, of bony frame, and melancholy aspect. Unconscious of our presence, he stood leaning on his fowling-piece at the entrance of the cavern, showing a strong aquiline nose, a thin moustache, a stern mouth, and lack-lustre eyes. He was bareheaded; his hair was thin, while a few grey locks fell behind his ears. His age might have been anywhere between forty and sixty. He must have been strikingly handsome in the days when the light still shone in those time-dimmed eyes and those bitter lips could still break into a smile—but handsome in a haughty and forbidding style. A kind of terrible energy still lurked beneath his features, spectral as those of an apparition.

By his side stood a hairless dog, low on its legs, which was evidently barking at us. Yet we could hear nothing! The dog, it was plain, was dumb, and *barked at us in silence!*

Suddenly the man turned towards us, and said in a voice of the most exquisite politeness:

'Gentlemen, it is out of the question for you to return to La

Chaux-de-Fonds tonight. Permit me to offer you my hospitality.'

Then, bending over his dog, he said:

'Stop barking, *Mystère*.'

The dog closed his jaws at once.

Makoko emitted a grunt. During the five hours that we had been enjoying the chase, Mathis and Makoko had told Allan and myself, who were strangers to the district, some strange and startling stories about our host, whom they represented as having had, like Faust, dealings with the Evil Spirit.

It was not without some trepidation, therefore, that we all moved out of the cavern.

'Gentlemen,' said the stranger, with a melancholy smile, 'it is many a long year since my door was thrown open to visitors. I am not fond of society, but I must tell you that one night, six months ago, a youth who had lost his way came and knocked at that door and begged for shelter till the morning. I refused him his request. Next day a body was found at the bottom of the big marl-pit—a body partly devoured by wolves.'

'Why, that must have been *Petit-Leduc*!' cried Makoko. 'So you were heartless enough to turn the poor lad away, at night and in the midst of winter! You are his murderer!'

'Truly spoken,' replied the man, simply. 'It was I who killed him. And now you see, gentlemen, that the incident has rendered me hospitable.'

'Would you tell us why you drove him from your door?' growled Makoko.

'Because,' he replied, quietly, 'my house brings misfortune.'

'I would rather risk meeting the powers of darkness than catching a cold in the head,' I retorted, laughing, and without further parley we set off, and in a short while had reached the door of the ancient mansion, which stood among the most desolate surroundings, on a shelf of barren rock, swept by all the winds of heaven.

The huge door, antique, iron-barred, and studded with enormous nails, revolved slowly on its hinges, and opened noiselessly. A shrunken little old dame was there to welcome us.

From the threshold we could see a large, high room, somewhat similar to the room formerly styled the retainers' hall. It certainly constituted a part of what remained of the castle, on the ruins of which the mansion had been erected some centuries before. It was fully lighted by the fire on the enormous hearth, where a huge log was burning, and by two petrol lamps hanging by chains from the stone roof. There was no furniture except a heavy

table of white wood, a large armchair upholstered in leather, a few stools, and a rude sideboard.

We walked the length of the room. The old woman opened a door. We found ourselves at the foot of a worm-eaten staircase with sunken steps. This staircase, a spiral one, led to the second storey of the building, where the old woman showed us to our rooms.

To this day I can recall our host—were I to live a hundred years I could not forget that figure such as it appeared to me, as if framed by the fireplace—when I went into the hall where Mother Appenzel had spread our supper.

He was standing in front of my friends, on the stone hearth of that enormous fireplace. He was in evening dress—but such evening dress! It was in the pink of fashion, but a fashion long since vanished. The high collar of the coat, the broad lapels, the velvet waistcoat, the silken knee-breeches and stockings, the cravat, all seemed to possess the elegance of days gone by.

By his side lay his dog, *Mystère*, his massive jaws parted in a yawn—yawning, just as he had barked, in *silence*.

'Has your dog been dumb for long?' I ventured to ask. 'What strange accident has happened to him—'

'He has been dumb from his birth,' replied my host, after a slight pause, as if this topic of conversation did not please him.

Still, I persisted in my questions.

'Was his father dumb—or perhaps his mother?'

'His mother, and his mother's mother,' he replied, still coldly, 'and *her* mother also.'

'So you were the master of *Mystère's* great-grandmother?'

'I was, sir. She was indeed a faithful creature, and one who loved me well. A marvellous watch-dog,' added my host, displaying sudden signs of emotion which surprised me.

'And she also was dumb from her birth?'

'No, sir. No, she was not born dumb—but *she became so one night when she had barked too much!*'

There was a world of meaning in the tone with which he spoke these words that at the moment I did not understand.

Supper was served. During the meal the conversation did not languish. Our host inquired whether we liked our rooms.

'I have a favour to beg of you,' I ventured to say. 'I should like to sleep in the haunted room!'

No sooner had I uttered the sentence than our host's pale face became still paler.

'Who has told you that there is a haunted room in this

house?' he asked, striving with difficulty to restrain an evident irritation.

Mother Appenzel, who had just entered, trembled violently.

'It was you, Mother Appenzel?'

'Pray do not scold the good woman,' I said. 'My indiscreet behaviour alone must bear the blame. I was attempting to enter a room the door of which was closed, when your servant forbade me to do so. "Do not go into the haunted chamber," she said.'

'And you naturally did not do so?'

'Well, yes; I did go in.'

'Heaven protect us!' wailed Mother Appenzel, letting fall a tumbler, which broke into pieces.

'Begone!' cried her master. Then, turning to us, he added, 'You are indeed full of curiosity, gentlemen!'

'Pray pardon us if we are so,' I said. 'Moreover, permit me to remind you that it was you yourself who alluded to the rumours current on the mountain-side. Well, it would afford me much pleasure if your generous hospitality should be the occasion of dispersing them. When I have slept in the room which enjoys so evil a reputation, and have rested there peacefully, it will no longer be said that, to use your own expression, "your house brings misfortune."'

Our host interrupted me: 'You shall not sleep in that room; it is no longer used as a bedroom. No one has slept there for fifty years past.'

'Who, then, was the last one to sleep in it?'

'I myself—and I should not advise anyone to sleep in it after me!'

'Fifty years ago, you say! You could only be a child at the time, at an age when one is still afraid at nights—'

'Fifty years ago I was twenty-eight!'

'Am I committing an indiscretion when asking you what happened to you in that room? I have just come from visiting it, and nothing whatever happened to me. The room seems to me the most natural of rooms. I even attempted to prop up a wardrobe which seemed as if it were about to fall forward on its face.'

'You laid hands on the wardrobe!' cried the man, throwing down his table-napkin, and coming towards me with the gleam of madness in his eyes. 'You actually laid hands on the wardrobe?'

'Yes,' was my quiet answer; 'as I say, it seemed about to fall.'

'But it cannot fall! It will never fall! Never again will it stand upright! It is its nature to be in that position for all time to come, trembling with fear for all eternity!'

We had all risen. The man's voice was harsh as he spoke these most mysterious words. Heavy drops of perspiration trickled

down his face. Those eyes of his, which we had thought dimmed for ever, flashed with fury. He was indeed awful to contemplate. He grasped my wrist and wrung it with a strength of which I would have deemed him incapable.

'You did not open it?'

'No.'

'Then you do not know what is in it? No? Well, all the better! By Heaven, I tell you, sir, it is all the better for *you*!'

Turning towards his dog, he shouted:

'To your kennel! When will you find your voice again, *Mystère*? Or are you going to die like the others—in *silence*?''

He had opened the door leading to a tower, and went out, driving the dog before him.

We were deeply moved at this unexpected scene. The man had disappeared in the darkness of the tower, still pursuing his dog.

'What did I tell you?' remarked Makoko, in a scarcely audible tone. 'You may all please yourselves, but, as for me, I do not intend to sleep here tonight. I shall sit up here in this hall until daybreak.'

'And so shall I,' added Mathis.

Makoko, bending over us, his eyes staring out of their sockets, continued: 'Do you not see that he is a madman?'

'You two fellows with your death-mask faces,' exclaimed Allan, 'are not going to prevent us from enjoying ourselves. Supposing we start a game of *écarté*. We will ask our host to take a hand; it will divert his thoughts.'

An extraordinary fellow was Allan. His fondness for card-playing amounted to a mania. He pulled out a pack of cards, and had hardly done so when our host re-entered the hall. He was now comparatively calm, but no sooner had he perceived the pack of cards on the table than his features became transformed, and assumed such an expression of fear and fury that I myself was terrified.

'Cards!' he cried. 'You have cards!'

Allan rose and said, pleasantly:

'We have decided not to retire for the night. We are about to have a friendly little game of *écarté*. Do you know the game?'

Allan stopped. He also had been struck with the fearful expression of our host's face. His eyes were bloodshot, the sparse hairs of his moustache stood out bristling, his teeth gleamed, while his lips hissed out the words:

'Cards! Cards!'

The words escaped with difficulty from his throat, as if some invisible hands were clutching it.

'Who sent you here with cards? What do you want with me? The cards must be burnt—they must be burnt!'

Of a sudden he grasped the pack and was about to cast it into the flames, but he stopped just on the point of doing so, his trembling fingers let drop the cards, and he sank into the armchair, exclaiming hoarsely:

'I am suffocating; I am suffocating!'

We rushed to his succour, but with a single effort of his bony fingers he had already torn off his collar and his cravat; and now, motionless, holding his head erect, and settling down in the huge armchair, he burst into tears.

'You are good fellows,' he said at last, in milder tones. 'You shall know everything. You shall not leave this house in ignorance, taking me for a madman—for a poor, miserable, melancholy madman.'

'Yes, indeed,' he continued; 'yes, you shall know everything. It may be of use to you.'

He rose, paced up and down, then halted in front of us, staring at us with the dimmed look that had given way to the momentary flash.

'Sixty years ago I was entering upon my eighteenth year. With all the overweening presumption of youth, I was sceptical of everything. Nature had fashioned me strong and handsome. Fate had endowed me with enormous wealth. I became the most fashionable youth of my day. Paris, gentlemen, with all its pleasures, was for ten years at my feet. When I had reached the age of twenty-eight I was on the brink of ruin. There remained to me between two and three hundred thousand francs and this manor, with the land surrounding it.

'Just at that time, gentlemen, I fell madly in love with an angelic creature. I could never have dreamt of the existence of such beauty and purity. The girl whom I adored was ignorant of the passionate love which was consuming me, and she remained so. Her family was one of the wealthiest in all Europe. For nothing in this world would I have had her suspect that I aspired to the honour of her hand in order to replenish my empty coffers in her dowry. So I went the way of the gambling-dens, in the vain hope of recovering my vanished millions. I lost all, and one fine evening I left Paris to come and bury myself in this old mansion, my sole refuge.

'I found here an old man, Father Appenzel; his granddaughter, of whom later on I made a servant; and his grandson, a child of tender years, who grew up to manhood on the estate, and who is now my steward. I fell a prey, on the very evening of my arrival,

to despair and ennui. The astounding events that followed took place that very evening.

"When I went up to my room—the room which one of you has asked to be allowed to occupy tonight—I had made up my mind to take my own life. A brace of pistols lay on the chest of drawers. Suddenly as I was putting my hand on one of the pistols, my dog began to howl in the courtyard—to howl as I have never heard the wind howl, unless it be tonight.

"So," thought I, "here is *Mystère* raising a death-howl. She must know that I am going to kill myself tonight."

I toyed with the pistol, recalling of a sudden what my past life had been, and wondering for the first time what my death would be like. Suddenly my eye lighted on the titles of a few old books which stood on a shelf hanging above the chest of drawers. I was surprised to see that all of them dealt with sorcerers and matters appertaining to the powers of evil. I took up a book, *The Sorcerers of the Jura*, and, with the sceptical smile of the man who has defied Fate, I opened it. The first two lines, printed in red, at once caught my eye:

"He who seriously wishes to see the devil has but to summon him with his whole heart, and he will come."

Then followed the story of an individual who, like myself, a lover in despair—like myself, a ruined man—had in all sincerity summoned to his help the Prince of Darkness, and who had been assisted by him; for, a few months later, he had once more become incredibly rich and had married his beloved. I read the story to the end.

"Well, here was a lucky fellow!" I exclaimed, tossing the book on to the chest of drawers. *Mystère* was still howling in the grounds. I parted the window-curtains, and could not help shuddering when I saw the dog's shadow dancing in the moonlight. It really seemed as if the slut was possessed of some evil spirit, for her movements were inexplicably eccentric. She seemed to be snapping at some invisible form!

I tried to laugh over the matter, but the state of my mind, the story I had just read, the howling of the dog, her strange leaps, the sinister locality, the old room, the pistols which I myself had loaded, all had contributed to take a greater hold of my imagination than I dared confess.

Leaving the window I strolled about the room for a while. Of a sudden I saw myself in the mirror of the wardrobe. My pallor was such that I thought that I was dead. Alas, no! The man standing before the wardrobe was not dead. It was, on the con-

trary, a living man who, with all his heart, was summoning the King of Lost Souls.

'Yes, with all my heart. I was too young to die; I wished to enjoy life for a while yet; to be rich once more; for her, for her sake, for the one who was an angel. Yes, yes, I, I myself summoned the devil!

'And then, in the mirror, side by side with my form, something appeared—something superhuman—a pale object—a mist, a terrible little cloud which was soon transformed into eyes—eyes of fearful loveliness. Another form was standing resplendent beside my haggard face; a mouth—a mouth which said to me, "Open!" At this I recoiled. But the mouth was still saying to me, "Open, open, if you dare!"

"Then something knocked three times upon the door inside the wardrobe—the door flew open of its own accord!"

Just at that instant the old man's narrative was interrupted by three knocks on the door, which suddenly opened, and a man entered.

'Was it you who knocked like that, Guillaume?' asked our host, striving in vain to regain his composure.

'Yes, master.'

'I had given you up for tonight. You saw the notary?'

'Yes; and I did not care to keep so great a sum of money about my person.'

We gathered that Guillaume was the gentleman's steward. He advanced to the table, took a little bag from the folds of his cloak, extracted some documents from it, and laid them on the table. Then he drew an envelope from his bag, emptied its contents on the table, and counted out twelve one-thousand-franc notes.

'There's the purchase-money for Misery Wood.'

'Good, Guillaume,' said our host, picking up the banknotes and replacing them in the envelope. 'You must be hungry. Are you going to sleep here tonight?'

'No; it is impossible. I have to call on the farmer. We have some business to transact together early in the morning. However, I do not mind having a bit of supper.'

'Go to Mother Appenzel, my good fellow; she will take good care of you,' adding, as the steward strode towards the kitchen, 'Take away all those rubbishy papers.'

The man picked up the documents, while the gentleman, taking a pocket-book out from his pocket, placed the envelope containing the twelve notes into it and returned the book to his pocket.

Then, resuming his narrative, in reply to a request from Makoko, he continued:

'You wish to know what the wardrobe contained? Well, I am

going to tell you. There was something which I saw—something which scorched my eyes. There shone within the recess of the wardrobe, written in letters of fire, three words: "Thou shalt win!"

"Yes," he continued, in a gloomy tone, "The devil had, in three words, expressed, in characters of fire, in the depths of the wardrobe, the fate that awaited me. He had left behind his sign-manual, the irrefutable proof of the hideous pact into which I had entered with him on that tragic night. "Thou shalt win!" A ruined gamester, I sought to become rich, and he told me: "Thou shalt win!" In three short words he granted me the world's wealth. "Thou shalt win!"

"Next morning old Appenzel found me lying unconscious at the foot of the wardrobe. Alas! when I had recovered my senses I had forgotten nothing. I was fated never to forget what I had seen. Wherever I go, wherever I wend my steps, be it night, be it day, I read the fiery phrase, "Thou shalt win!"—on the walls of darkness, on the resplendent orb of the sun, on the earth and in the skies, within myself when I close my eyes, on your faces when I look at you!"

The old man, exhausted, ceased speaking, and fell back, moaning, into the armchair.

"I must tell you," he resumed, after a few moments, "That my experience had had so terrifying an effect on me that I had been compelled to stay in bed, where Father Appenzel brought me a soothing potion of herbs. Addressing me, he said: "Something incredible has happened, sir. Your dog has become dumb. *She barks in silence!*"

"Oh, I know, I understand!" I exclaimed. "She will not recover her voice until *he* shall have returned!"

Father Appenzel looked at me in amazement and fright, for my hair was standing on end. In spite of myself, my gaze was straying towards the wardrobe. Father Appenzel, as alarmed and agitated as myself, went on to say:

"When I found you, sir, on the floor this morning the wardrobe was inclined as it is now, while its door was open. I closed it, but I was unable to get it to stand upright. It seems always on the point of falling forward."

"I begged old Appenzel to leave me to myself. I got out of bed, went to the wardrobe and opened its door. Conceive, I pray you, my feelings when I had done so. The sentence, that sentence written in characters of fire, was still there! It was graven in the boards at the back; it had burnt the boards with its imprint; and by day I read what I had read by night—the words: "Thou shalt win!"

"I flew out of the room. I called for help. Father Appenzel returned. I said to him: "Look into the depths of that wardrobe, and tell me what you see there!"

"My servant did as I bid him, and said to me: "Thou shalt win!"

"I dressed myself. I fled like a madman from the accursed house, and wandered in the mountains. The mountain air did me good. When I came home in the evening I was perfectly calm; I had thought matters over; my dog might have become dumb through some perfectly natural physiological phenomenon. With regard to the sentence in the wardrobe, it had not come there of itself, and, as I had not had any previous acquaintance with that piece of furniture, it was probable that the three fatal words had been there for countless years, inscribed by someone addicted to the black art, following upon some gambling affair which was no concern of mine.

"I ate my supper, and went to bed in the same room. The night passed without incident.

"Next day I went to La Chaux-de-Fonds, to call on a notary. All that this adventure with the wardrobe had succeeded in doing was to imbue me with the idea of tempting fate in the shape of cards, one last time, ere putting into execution my idea about suicide. I borrowed a few one-thousand-franc notes on the security of the estate, and I took train for Paris. As I ascended the staircase of the club I recalled my nightmare, and remarked to myself ironically, for I placed no faith in the success of this supreme attempt: "We shall now see whether, if the devil helps me—" I did not finish the sentence.

"The bank was being put up to auction when I entered the salon. I secured it for two hundred louis. I had not reached the middle of my deal when I had already won two hundred and fifty thousand francs! But no longer would any of the players stake against me. *I was winning every game!*

"I was jubilant; I had never dreamt that such luck would be mine. I threw up the bank—i.e., what remained of it for me to hold. I next amused myself at throwing away chances, just to see what would happen. In spite of this I continued winning. Exclamations were heard on all sides. The players vowed I had the devil's own luck. I collected my winnings and left.

"No sooner had I reached the street when I began to think and to become alarmed. The coincidence between the scene of the wardrobe and of my extraordinary success as a banker troubled me. Of a sudden, and to my surprise, I found myself wending my way back to the club. I was resolved to probe the matter to the bottom. My short-lived joy was disturbed by the fact that I had

not lost once. So it was that I was apxious to lose just once.

When I left the club for the second time, at six o'clock in the morning, I had won, in money and on parole, no less than a couple of millions. But I had not once lost—not a single, solitary time. I felt myself becoming a raving madman. When I say that I had not lost once, I speak with regard to money, for when I played for nothing, without stakes, to see, just for the fun of the matter, I lost inexorably. But no sooner had a punter staked even as low as half a franc against me, I won his money. It mattered little, a sou or a million francs. I could no longer lose. "Thou shalt win!" Oh, that terrible curse! That curse! For a whole week did I trv. I went into the worst gambling-hells. I sat down to card-tables presided over by card-sharpers; I won even from them; I won from one and all against whom I played. I did nothing but win!

'So, you no longer laugh, gentlemen! You scoff no more! You see now, good sirs, that one should never be in a hurry to laugh! I told you I had seen the devil! Do you believe me now? I possessed then the certainty, the palpable proof, visible to one and all, the natural and terrestrial proof of my revolting compact with the devil. The law of probabilities no longer existed as far as I was concerned. There were not even any probabilities. There remained only the supernatural certainty of winning eternally—until the day of death. Death! I could no longer dream of it as a desire. For the first time in my life I dreaded it. The terrors of death haunted me, because of what awaited me at the end!

'My uppermost thought was to redeem my soul—my wretched soul, my lost soul. I frequented the churches. I saw priests. I prostrated myself at the foot of the church steps. I beat my delirious head on the sacred flagstones! I prayed to God that I might lose, just as I had prayed to the devil that I might win. On leaving the holy place I was wont to hurry to some low gambling-den and stake a few louis on a card. But I continued winning for ever and ever! "Thou shalt win!"

'Not for a single second did I entertain the idea of owing my happiness to those accursed millions. I offered up my heart to God as a burnt offering, I distributed the millions I had won to the poor, and I came here, gentlemen, to await the death which spurns me—the death I dread!

'You have never played since those days?' I asked.

'I have never played from that time until now.'

Allan had read my thoughts. He too was dreaming that it might be possible to rescue from his monomania the man whom we both persisted in considering insane.

'I feel sure,' he said, 'that so great a sacrifice has won you pardon. Your despair has been undoubtedly sincere, and your punishment a terrible one. What more could Heaven require of you? In your place *I should try*—'

'You would try—what?' exclaimed the man, springing from his seat.

'I should try whether I were still doomed to win!' The man struck the table a violent blow with his clenched fist.

'And so this is all the remedy you can suggest! So that is all the narrative of a curse transcending all things earthly has inspired you with? You seek to induce an old lunatic to play, with the object of demonstrating to him that he is not insane! For I read full well in your eyes what you think of me: "He is mad, mad, mad!" You do not believe a single word of all I have told you. You think I am insane, young man! And you, too,' he added, addressing Allan, 'You think I am insane—mad, mad, mad! I tell you that I have seen the devil! Yes, your old madman has seen the devil! And he is going to prove it to you. The cards! Where are the cards?'

Espying them on the edge of the table, he sprang on them.

It is you who have so willed it. I had harboured a supreme hope that I should die without having again made the infernal attempt, so that when my hour had come I might imagine that Heaven had forgiven me. Here are your cards! I will not touch them. They are yours. Shuffle them—deal me which you please—"stack" them as you will. I tell you that I shall win. Do you believe me now?'

Allan had quietly picked up the cards.

The man, placing his hand on his shoulder, asked, 'You do not believe me?'

'We shall see,' replied Allan.

'What shall the stakes be?' I inquired.

'I do not know, gentlemen, whether you are well off or not, but I feel bound to inform you—you who have come to destroy my last hope—that you are ruined men.'

Thereupon he took out his pocket-book and laid it on the table, saying:

'I will play you five straight points at écarté for the contents of this pocket-book. This just by way of a beginning. After that, I am willing to play you as many games as you see fit, until I cast you out of doors picked clean, your friends and yourself, ruined for the rest of your lives—yes, picked bare.'

'Picked bare?' repeated Allan, who was far less moved than myself. 'Do you want even our shirts?'

'Even your souls,' cried the man, 'Which I intend to present to the devil in exchange for my own.'

Allan winked at me, and asked:

'Shall we say "Done," and go halves in this?'

I agreed, shuffled the pack, and handed it to my opponent.

He cut, I dealt. I turned up the knave of hearts. Our host looked at his hand and led. Clearly he ought not to have played the hand he held—three small clubs, the queen of diamonds, and the seven of spades. He took a trick with his queen, I took the four others, and, as he had led, I marked two points. I entertained not the slightest doubt that he was doing his utmost to lose.

It was his turn to deal. He turned up the king of spades. He could not restrain a shudder when he beheld that black-faced card, which, in spite of himself, gave him a trick.

He scanned his hand anxiously. It was my turn to call for cards. He refused them, evidently believing that he held a very poor hand; but my own was as bad as his, and he had a ten of hearts, which took my nine—I held the nine, eight, and seven of hearts.

He then played diamonds, to which I could not respond and two clubs higher than mine. Neither of us held a single trump. He scored a point, which, with the one secured to him by his king, gave him two. We were 'evens,' either of us being in a position to end matters at once if we made three points.

The deal was mine. I turned up the eight of diamonds. This time both of us called for cards. He asked for one, and showed me the one he had discarded—the seven of diamonds. He was anxious not to hold any trumps. His wish was gratified, and he succeeded in making me score another two points, which gave me four.

In spite of ourselves, Allan and I glanced towards the pocket-book. Our thoughts ran: "There lies a small fortune which is shortly to be ours, one which, in all conscience, we shall not have had much trouble in winning."

Our host dealt in his turn, and when I saw the cards he had given me I considered the matter as good as settled. This time he had not turned up a king, but the seven of clubs. I held two hearts and three trumps—the ace and king of hearts, the ace, ten and nine of clubs. I led the king, my opponent followed with the queen; I flung the ace on the table, my opponent being compelled to take it with the knave of hearts, and he then played a diamond, which I trumped. I played the ace of trumps; he took it with the queen, but I was ready for him with my last card, the ten of clubs. He had the knave of trumps! As I had led he scored two, making 'Four all.' Our host smothered a curse which was hovering on his lips.

'No need for you to worry,' I remarked; 'no one has won yet.'

'We are about to prove to you,' said Allan, in the midst of a deathly silence, 'that you can lose just like any ordinary mortal.'

Our host groaned, 'I cannot lose.'

The interest in the game was now at its height. A point on either side, and either of us would be the winner. If I turned up the king the game was ended, and I won twelve thousand francs from a man who claimed that he could not lose. I had dealt. I turned up the king—the king of hearts. I had won!

My opponent uttered a cry of joy. He bent over the card, picked it up, considered it attentively, fingered it, raised it to his eyes, and we thought that he was about to press it to his lips. He murmured:

'Great heavens, can it be? Then—then I have lost!'

'So it would seem,' I remarked.

Allan added, 'You now see full well that one should not place any faith in what the devil says.'

The gentleman took his pocket-book and opened it.

'Gentlemen,' he sighed, 'bless you for having won all that is in this book. Would that it contained a million! I should gladly have handed it over to you.'

With trembling hands he searched the pocket-book, emptying it of all its contents, with a look of surprise at not finding at once the twelve thousand francs he had deposited in its folds. They were not there!

The pocket-book, searched with feverish hands, lay empty on the table. *There was nothing in the pocket-book! Nothing!*

We sat dumbfounded at this inexplicable phenomenon—the empty pocket-book! We picked it up and fingered it. We searched it carefully, only to find it empty. Our host, livid and as one possessed, was searching himself, and begging us to search him. We searched him—we searched him, because it was beyond our power to resist his delirious will; but we found nothing—nothing!

'Hark!' exclaimed our host. 'Hark, hark! Does it not seem to you tonight that the wind sounds like the voice of a dog?'

We listened, and Makoko answered, 'It is true! The wind really seems to be barking—there, behind the door!'

The door was shaking strangely, and we heard a voice calling, 'Open!'

I drew the bolts and opened the door. A human form rushed into the room.

'It is the steward,' I said.

'Sir, sir!' he ejaculated.

'What is it? we all exclaimed, breathlessly, and wondering what was about to follow.

'Sir, I thought I had handed you your twelve thousand francs. Indeed, I am positive I did so. Those gentlemen doubtless saw me.'

'Yes, indeed,' from all of us.

'Well, I have just discovered them in my bag. I cannot understand how it has happened. I have returned to bring them back to you—*once more*. Here they are.'

The steward again pulled out the identical envelope, and a second time counted the twelve one-thousand-franc notes, adding:

'I know not what ails the mountain-side tonight, but it terrifies me. I shall sleep here.'

The twelve thousand francs were now lying on the table. Our host cried: 'This time we see them there, there before us! Where are the cards? Deal them. The twelve thousand in five straight points, to see, to know for certain. I tell you that I wish to know—to know.'

I dealt. My opponent called for cards; I refused them. He had five trumps. He scored two points. He dealt the cards. He turned up the king. I led. He again had five trumps. Three and two are five! He had won!

Then he howled; yes, howled like the wind which had the voice of a dog. He snatched the cards from the table and cast them into the flames. 'Into the fire with the cards. Let the fire consume them!' he shrieked. Suddenly he strode towards the door. Outside a dog barked—a dog raising a death-howl.

The man reached the door, and speaking through it asked:

'Is that you, *Mystère*?'

To what phenomenon was it due that both wind and dog were silent simultaneously?

The man softly drew the bolts and half opened the door. No sooner was the door ajar than the infernal yelping broke out so prolonged and so lugubrious that it made us shiver to our very marrow. Our host had now flung himself upon the door with such force that we could almost think he had smashed it. Not content with having pushed back the bolts, he pressed with his knees and arms against the door, without uttering a sound. All we heard was his panting respiration.

Then, when the death-like yelping had ceased, and both within and without silence reigned supreme, the man, turning towards us and tottering forward, said:

'*He has returned! Beware!*'

Midnight. We have gone our respective ways. Makoko and Mathis have remained below beside the dying embers. Allan has sought

his bedroom, while, driven by some unknown inner force controlling me absolutely, I find myself in the haunted room. I am repeating the doings of the man whose story we had heard that night; I select the same book, open it at the same page; I go to the same window; I pull the curtain aside; I gaze upon the same moonlit landscape, for the wind has long since driven off the tempest-clouds and the fog. I only see bare rocks, shining like steel under the rays of the bright moon, and—on the desolate plateau—a weirdly dancing shadow—the shadow of *Mystère*, with her formidable jaws wide apart—jaws that I can see barking. Do I hear the barking? Yes; it seems to me that I hear it. I let the curtain drop. I take my candlestick from the chest of drawers. I step towards the wardrobe. I look at myself in its mirrored panel. I dream of *him* who wrote the words which lie concealed within. Whose face is it that I see in the mirror? It is my own! But is it possible that the face of our host on the fatal night could have been more pallid than mine is now? In all truth, my face is that of a dead man. On one side—there—there—that little cloud—that misty cloudlet in the mirror—cheek by jowl with my face—those fearful eyes—those lips! Oh, if I could but scream! I cannot. I am powerless to cry out, *when suddenly I hear three knocks*. And—and my hand strays of its own accord towards the door of the wardrobe—my inquisitive hand—my accursed hand.

Of a sudden my hand is gripped in the vice I know so well. I look round. I am face to face with our host, who says to me in a voice which seems to come from another world:

'Do not open it!'

Next morning we did not ask our host to give us the opportunity of winning back our money. We fled from his roof without even taking leave of him. Twelve thousand francs were sent that evening to our strange host through Makoko's father, to whom we had told our adventure. He returned them to us, with the following note:

'We are quits. When we played, both the first game, which you won, and the second one, which you lost, we *believed*, you and I that we were staking twelve thousand francs. That must be sufficient for us. The devil has my soul, but he shall not possess my honour.'

We were not at all anxious to keep the twelve thousand francs, so we presented them to a hospital in La Chaux-de-Fonds which was in sore need of money. Following upon urgent repairs, to which our donation was applied, the hospital, one winter's night, was so thoroughly burned to the ground that at noon of the following day nothing but ashes remained of it.

THE DEVIL'S SERVANTS

'Superstition is very much alive among German people both at home and among our communities abroad. Criminal superstition in Germany is probably more frequent now than at any time in the last fifty years.

Almost every town still has its witch and almost every village its "devil's servant" and vampires are not unknown.

"Even today many superstitions are alive," declares Johann Kruse of Hamburg, an opponent of modern witchcraft. "Before long, man will conquer other planets, but when will he give up belief in witchcraft, black magic and vampirism? Never!

"I have ample evidence regarding this terrible thing," adds Herr Kruse, a 40-year veteran investigator, "but as yet I do not have full statistics on how many deaths have been followed by profanation of the corpse."

A fellow hexfighter, Dr. Herbert Auhofer, estimates that up to 70 lawsuits involving witchcraft are before German courts every year.

Hesse Kriminalpolizei Amtsblatt,
May 1965



Vampire's Prey

HANNS HEINZ EWERS

He was glad that he had to stay home this week. He spent hours lying on the sofa, thinking about his constant fatigue, about the emptiness that had again taken hold of him. He wondered what he could do about it, what had caused it. But his thoughts always wandered back to the anonymous letter; perhaps he was really poisoned. And he felt certain now that his sickness had something to do with women.

His butler announced Mrs. Lotte van Ness. She was not alone—she had brought Dr. Samuel Cohn with her. Dr. Cohn was a man after Lotte's heart: German and Jewish at the same time. There was a bit of the Phoenician about him—a wealthy shipowner in Carthage might have looked like that—with black, wavy hair and large round eyes that were a little near-sighted. His thick, fleshy lips disclosed two rows of gleaming white teeth, but his complexion was pale and unhealthy—he needed sun and air. He was quite stout—obviously from lack of exercise. A badly groomed bachelor in his forties who needed a woman to take care of him. He was New York born, but he was German by education and thought—and in his culture German rather than Jewish. He was in great demand as a physician and as a speaker. A clever and well-educated man—and a kind one.

'Don't get up!' he said. 'How are you?'

'Very well, thank you! It is very kind of you, Doctor, to take the trouble to come here, but it really wasn't necessary. I should rest, I know—'

Mrs. van Ness interrupted him. 'I asked Dr. Cohn to come to see you. He is going to examine you.'

Frank Braun looked at her, shaking his head. 'This is the ninth one, now, with all due respect to Dr. Cohn's knowledge. Do you think he will find any more than the others have?' He dropped

back on his cushions with a sigh. 'Please go ahead and examine me, if it must be.'

The physician examined him thoroughly, asking only the most pertinent questions. 'One thing is certain,' he said finally, 'your body is perfectly all right, inside and out! There is your chronic laryngitis, of course, from smoking too many cigarettes—'

'I should smoke less,' Frank Braun affirmed, 'I know!'

'You can do as you please about that,' the physician replied. 'With your smoker's cough you could live three times three hundred years. I should like to ask you a few questions, however.'

'Go ahead, please!'

Had he ever had malaria? When? Where?

Yes, he had had malaria, in Singapore and Colombo, but he had never had an attack since then, neither in the tropics nor in the temperate zone. Had the attack been severe? Yes, quite. How had he treated himself? With quinine, of course, with large doses of quinine. Did he know where he had contracted the disease?

Frank Braun tried to remember. It had broken out on the Lloyd steamer—but he had probably contracted it in the South Seas.

Where? In New Guinea.

'Oh, so you were in the South Seas, too?' Dr. Cohn asked casually. 'You must tell me about that sometime. Are there any real cannibals left there? I mean, natives who actually eat human meat? Did you ever see any?'

Frank Braun laughed. 'If there are cannibals there? I should say there are—everywhere in that part of the world, in New Guinea, New Mecklenburg, New Pomerania, Bougainville and Buka. Of course, all the Kanakas and Papuans will swear that their particular tribe has never tasted Kai-Kai—human meat—but that the neighbouring tribe regards it as the choicest delicacy! All the natives there are cannibals if they can get human meat without being caught.'

'All?' Dr. Cohn said quizzically. 'So you really think the natives there all eat human meat when they can get it?'

'Not all of them. The missionaries claim that there are only a few individuals in each tribe who swear by this delicacy, while others would not touch it. It seems that tastes differ even among cannibals.'

'Hm,' the physician continued. 'I read a very interesting article the other day in the *Journal of Tropical Diseases*. The author claims that the cannibals with an unquenchable appetite for human meat suffer from a disease—a disease whose symptoms are somewhat similar to malaria. Oddly enough, the symptoms resemble those of your own ailment.'

Frank Braun laughed aloud. You are priceless, Doctor! That is truly New York—truly America! But unfortunately, I never had the slightest appetite for human meat. Tell me, is the author of your article an American, too?

'No, he is a German—a professor at the Institute for Tropical Diseases in Hamburg. He spent many years doing research work in the South Seas. In fact I would advise you to go to Hamburg yourself—it is the only place in the world where they know something about these exotic diseases.'

Frank Braun smiled. 'Thank you for the prescription, I will have it filled as soon as the English clear the way to the pharmacy. By the way, what insect is it whose bite causes your cannibal malaria?'

'It is no insect. The Hamburg physician describes it as a kind of bat, some species of flying dog that attacks its victims while they are asleep, biting them and sucking the blood through the tiny wound. I know, it sounds fantastic that this bite should not only have a similar effect as the bite of the anopheles, but that it should also create thirst for human blood and hunger for human meat. But it does not sound so impossible if you remember what effect the bite of the tsetse fly has, or that of a snake or a rabid dog. Their victims commonly suffer from fixed ideas and abnormal, fantastic hallucinations.'

Frank Braun became attentive. He looked at Lotte van Ness a long time before asking her casually:

'What do you think, Lotte?'

She shrugged her shoulders. 'I don't know.'

That confirmed his suspicion. 'Haven't you yourself been in New Guinea once, with your husband?'

'No,' she said. 'We came up from New Zealand on an English steamer and stayed for a while on the Solomon Islands; from there we went on to Yokohama without stopping.'

'Oh—but then you *were* in the South Seas! Did you too have malaria?'

She looked at him oddly, her lips curling in an inscrutable smile. 'No, I never did.'

'You are lying!' he thought. He turned again to Dr. Cohn. 'Do you believe this strange disease is contagious?'

The physician shrugged his shoulders. 'Possibly—possibly not: I really don't know. No one in this country knows anything about it—you have to go to Hamburg for information.'

Frank Braun nodded. 'Yes, I am sure they know all about it over there. Doesn't it seem to you, Doctor, that all of Europe is afflicted with this disease, in fact, almost half the world? It seems

so to me. Couldn't you make the people all over the world acquainted with your theory—perhaps in a letter to *The Times*? Tell the Germans and English, the Russians, French and Turks and all the rest of them that their wars are a regrettable error, the effect of a contagious South Seas disease that created cannibal instincts in human beings, and forces them to kill each other?—If people were to realize the truth of this, their war would be over tomorrow and the regiments would march in formation to the Institute for Tropical Diseases in Hamburg to be inoculated. While to you and your illustrious Hamburg colleague Mrs. van Ness would build a monument in front of the German piers in Hoboken—wouldn't you, Lotte?

'Don't be silly, please!' she said. 'Can't you be serious?'

He stood before her, looking her straight in the eye. 'You have known me a long time, Lotte Levi. You should know that I am never more serious than when I am joking like this.'

She evaded his eyes and shrugged her shoulders. 'As you like.'

He went over to the window, drummed on the pane. 'My suspicion is right,' he thought.

But how, how? The more he thought about it, the more confused he became. There were no clues, no cause or effect—nothing definite on which to base his conclusions. He was sick—yes, that was true. He felt tired, empty, drained. Therefore there must be something that caused it, something that drained him of his vitality and of his blood.

But could it be Lotte? Lotte Levi? Who had loved him all these years, who loved him more than any other woman? It was ridiculous, absurd!

And yet a firm conviction grew in him: his sickness had something to do with her. Somehow she was involved in it—and not only she, but other women as well.

He turned abruptly and joined the others who were talking quietly.

'I am sorry, Doctor,' he apologized, 'I did not mean to offend you.'

Dr. Cohn shook hands with him. 'Perhaps a new symptom will appear that might give us a clue. Let me know then!'

After he had gone Lotte quickly turned to Frank Braun.

'You suspect me of something?'

'And what if I do?'

Her laugh sounded shrill. 'Suspicious against me—you!' She took his hand and continued in a calm voice: 'Tell me, what kind of suspicions have you?'

He gave himself up to the soft touch of her fingers. 'What kind? But I don't know, Lotte.'

'Don't go home yet!' Lotte van Ness said one evening. 'Professor Kachele is coming tonight.'

Frank Braun sat down again. 'Professor Kachele? How far did he get with your horoscope?'

Lotte smiled. 'He is very thorough, it seems. I probably won't get it for quite a while. He had to lay the work aside temporarily; do you remember what he was trying to tell you that time you could not stay? He told me all about it afterwards and I asked him to write it out for me. He finished yesterday—that's why he is coming tonight.'

'You bought that, Lotte? But what are you going to do with it?'

She shrugged her shoulders. 'Perhaps I'll give it to a scientific journal, perhaps I will make you a present of it—I don't know. Why should I buy only jewellery and books, why not a manuscript for a change?'

The Professor arrived breathless, anxious to begin his lecture at once. He ate heartily but rapidly, continually attempting to speak about the matters that were uppermost in his mind. 'Later, my dear Professor,' Mrs. van Ness kept telling him, 'later! You must eat your dinner first!'

After dinner they repaired to the library. Lotte made Dr. Kachele sit in a comfortable armchair, while she buried herself in the cushions on the sofa.

'Now let us hear it!' she said.

He began instantly and spoke very fast, interrupting himself now and then to look at his manuscript for an erudite quotation. His voice was loud and had a harsh rasping sound.

Frank Braun sat in a huge armchair in a corner of the room between the book shelves, his long legs stretched out before him, his arms on the soft arms of the chair. He smoked a cigarette and listened carefully, trying to accustom his ear to Dr. Kachele's sharp voice.

But he heard only sounds—words without meaning, sentences his tired brain failed to grasp.

It had come over him again, suddenly, this tired emptiness, this sensation of being drained and hollow. It came over him every day now, for an hour or two, without any apparent cause. Suddenly it was there: a dense fog that clouded his brain.

He did not sleep and he did not dream—he heard only sounds, scraping, grating sounds strung together into an ugly unmusical tone pattern, seemingly coming from far away. He attempted to get up and escape from the room but he could not move. So he stayed where he was in the big armchair, suffering patiently the nerve-racking torture.

Then Lotte spoke and her soft cello voice broke the spell. He could move now. He jumped to his feet, walked over to the Professor's chair and took the manuscript from him.

'It was very interesting, Baron,' he cried. 'May I have it, please, I want to look up something in it.' Without waiting for an answer, he went into Lotte's bedroom. There he flung himself down on the sofa and closed his eyes.

But he was wide-awake now; the tiredness was completely gone, just as suddenly as it had come. He took up the manuscript and began to read—

It held his attention from the first page. Such thorough work! There were quotations from Egyptian texts, from Coptic, Hebrew, Latin and Greek sources. And there was Assyrian and Babylonian material, as well as excerpts in Geez, the old Ethiopian Church language. Through Byzantine words in the Albanian, Central Slav and Magyar languages, the author followed the trail from the south-east northward into Europe, and traced it from Abyssinia through Amharic, Arabic and the Negro dialects across Africa as far as Dahomey. Everything was made clear: the trail started in the stars many thousands of years ago and could be followed clear down into the bloody sacrifice dens of New York—the trail of an Astral myth that had become real.

Very real, indeed—Frank Braun remembered the slim, dark-skinned Negro priestess whose nightly sacrifices he had attended several years ago in Haiti, in the Honfòù temple at Petit-Goave. With her own hands she had slaughtered her child and had presented its blood to the faithful, mixed with rum!

The Professor proved it to be purely a myth that had eventually become stark, bloody reality. The dream of a shepherd astrologer in the desert, of a poet—but a dream whose mighty consequences were felt all over the world for thousands of years.

The sun set and the sun rose—all the creatures on earth saw the phenomenon. But the poet in the desert saw more. To him, the sun, the young, beautiful sun, only a day old, had been killed by a cruel god. And the new sun that rose again the next morning, more beautiful, more scintillant still, must be the dead sun's beautiful daughter. She was her child—and yet the old sun herself, resurrected from her night of death. That was the story which the dreaming shepherd in the desert read in the stars, the age-old myth of the dismembered child.

Labartu was the Babylonian name for the star-goddess who stole the sun child, tore her into pieces and ate her; Labartu, the wife of Baal. And she was none other than the Indian Kali, Durga, the Killer, the wife of Shiva, the Destroyer. She was his

sakti, his emanation, the fruit of his thought—and the bloody hand of his brain. And she not only destroyed the heavenly child, the young sun, but also persecuted the children of man, killing them in their mothers' wombs or slaying them shortly after birth. And therefore one had to offer sacrifice to her to invoke her mercy and to make her pass by the young mother's house. That was the toll that Labartu demanded for herself and for Baal. And as she ruled in Babylon, she also ruled in Sidon and Tyre and Carthage where her name was Astarte, and where, as the mate of Moloch, her reign of terror extended all over Phœnicia.

Every first-born child was hers. The terrible Durga demanded only girl children who were drowned in milk to the glory of the goddess, as is done even now in the remote corners of India. But Astarte demanded all—she claimed every first-born child that a mother bore. It was her cruel right all over the Orient, and humbly she was given her due by the people of the East, including Israel. Why does every first-born child in the oldest part of the bible story disappear mysteriously? Ishmuel and Esau, and Abel, David's first son by Bathsheba. And Jeptha's merry little daughter, and many others, many, many more.

Was not Isaac to be sacrificed to the same thought? But the great God of the Jews showed mercy, and with the sacrifice of two white doves Israel later bought off the cruel right of the gods upon their first-born. And yet Solomon and many other Jewish kings and nobles continued to sacrifice their children to the terrible goddess. With their own hands they cut their children's throats, let the blood flow over the altar and dismembered the little bodies as Baaltis commanded.

The cult of the child-killing goddess was brought to Rome—Pliny tells about it. And from Greece it spread over the whole Balkans as far as the Danube Valley, and westward from there. It reached its wildest peak in the seventeenth century when Elisabeth Bathory, the Bloody Countess, filled her spacious rooms with the dying groans of the Hungarian girls whom she whipped to death.

The cult persisted throughout the Middle Ages until the present day, flaring up or dying down, but ever present in one form or another all over Europe. It took root as the Black Mass which the Church vainly tried to stamp out with fire and sword.

Did not Monsieur Gilles de Rais slay more than eight hundred children with his own hands? He, *Maréchal de France*, famous warrior, banner bearer to the Maid of Orléans! And the Marquise de Montespan, the mistress of Louis XIV, and by him the mother of French princes, did she not offer more than once her own body

as a precious altar on which the Abbé Guibourg dismembered new-born children in the chapel of the Castle at St. Denis?

Both she and the Baron de Raïs invoked the devil Astaroth; he was to help her keep the King's love as he was to help the Maréchal make gold. Yet Astaroth was only another name for Astarte.

From Carthage the murderous cult found its way into Central Africa. Moloch's wife Astarte was called by the Greeks Basileia, the Queen. The Semites changed it to Bersilia and the Copts made it into Berzelya, meaning the goddess who kills children with iron hands. And even now the Abyssinians speak of Werzelya who steals and murders suckling infants, and who slays the unborn in the mother's womb.

From the banks of the Congo the black slaves brought the cult with them to America. And in the Voodoo cult the name of the goddess-priestess is the same that the Greeks had given her: Queen Mamaloi—because the Negroes cannot pronounce 'R.' Actually, her title is Mama—Roi: mother and queen!

And she is still drinking blood, she, Durga—Astarte—Mamaloi, the Killer. Even today—in the heart of New York!—

Frank Braun went back to the library where the Professor was still talking to Lotte. They spoke about horoscopes now, about the strange prophecy of Alexander. . . .

Frank Braun interrupted him, returning the manuscript. 'Despite your excellent treatise, Professor, I still don't understand how your astral myth can suddenly come to life again somewhere else in a different form. You traced the whole development of the myth, you followed it through the centuries and explained the connections, but you don't believe, Baron, that perhaps my Mamaloi in Petit-Goave had any knowledge of this myth? You don't really believe that Maréchal Gilles de Raïs, that the Hungarian Countess or the dismembered children were actually victims of the age-old rite? How do you explain, Professor, that spontaneously, centuries afterwards, the old idea can be reborn in a different form in a human brain?'

The Professor did not answer for a minute, edging back and forth on his chair, but finally he said: 'I realize that this is a gap in my work. I may be able to fill it in—perhaps! But you know, I don't like to think about it—much less talk about it.'

Rubbing his nose vehemently, he continued: 'It is absurd to believe in a god and not in a devil, you cannot imagine one without the other. The devil is as strong as the Lord! He appears when he wishes and where he pleases. In me—' His voice sank to a faint, awestruck whisper—in me he did not trouble to ask whether I

liked it or not. Old women, ugly, stinking old women—that pleases him, the great Lord, when it happens to be his whim. Goethe also knew that—he writes about it in the second part of *Faust*! And as for myself—well, you know, Doctor, what happened to me!

He blew his nose in an enormous handkerchief, making a noise like a trumpet. Then he took off his glasses and cleaned them carefully, blinking at Frank Braun out of his half-blind eyes.

'Do I look like a faun?' he broke out again. 'Would anyone guess that in me lives Satan-Phallus, Pan the Ram-God, who has no brains and thinks with his brush? And yet it pleased him to erect his temple in these poor miserable bones of mine. This marvel, Doctor, is sitting before you now, very much alive and real—running free through the streets of New York, pleased that he can at last do some decent work again and does not have to make urine analyses. I know exactly what I did, I know all the details—but why I did it, how this absurd idea suddenly took hold of me—of me, a quiet scholar, the soberest professor in Germany—that I don't know. It simply was there, digging its claws into my brain, holding me in iron shackles. Since then I know what it means to be possessed. After my experience, nothing surprises me any more, no dream, no whim, no wildest thought. Everything, absolutely everything is possible in a human brain.'

Frank Braun asked: 'So you believe, Professor, that——'

'Yes, yes, and again, yes!' Dr. Kachele cried. 'I believe—and I have paid dearly for this belief—that no human being can be sure of himself for as much as a quarter of an hour. I believe that every human brain is an empty room in which any moment something—a god, a devil, or whatever you want to call it—may perform the craziest dances. Very pious and saintly dances, perhaps—or very ugly and cruel ones, if fate will have it. And if this kind and beautiful lady here, if Mrs. van Ness should suddenly reveal herself as the maddest priestess of Baaltis, if she should dismember young boys and drink their blood, I would not regard it as anything extraordinary, in the light of my own experiences. I would regret it, but as a scientist I would include the interesting case in my treatise, simply as another example of the age-old Labartu cult.'

He placed his glasses back on his nose, rose from his chair and put the manuscript on the table.

'A cigar on the way, Baron?' Frank Braun asked.

'No, thank you,' the Professor said, 'I still don't smoke, I still don't drink and I am still the soberest, the most uninteresting man

in the world. But if what I said tonight sounds fantastic to you, just remember what brought me to America!

The Professor had been gone for an hour, but the two were still sitting in the library, smoking and sipping their wine. They did not look at each other and did not speak.

'Do you want the car,' she finally asked, 'to go home?'

'I want to stay here tonight!' he said, looking her full in the face.

She rose quickly from her chair. 'Oh, just as you like. Here is the wine, help yourself. I'll send the maid for you when I am ready.'

At the door she turned and smiled back at him: 'Wouldn't you like to find out tonight whether I might not be the blood-drinking Astarte after all? You used to call me the Phoenician, didn't you?'

Frank Braun let her go without answering, but he thought: 'Everything is possible in a human brain.'

He tried to fathom it——

Fathom what?—What was possible?

But she was right; he wanted to stay with her tonight to watch her, to spy on her. But what was it he expected to find? Did he expect to find that Lotte was the blood-dripping priestess—and himself her victim, the dismembered child?

It was ridiculous, absurd, like Dr. Cohn's silly hypothesis of the South Sea disease.

And yet the suspicion was planted firmly in his mind and he could not rid himself of it.

He drank a last glass of wine and followed the maid. He undressed, took a cold shower and put on his pyjamas.

When he came in, she was sitting on the wide bed, her red hair falling loosely over her lace nightgown. She was playing with some glittering objects which she dropped on the night table as soon as she heard his light footstep. But Frank Braun had seen what she had in her hands: little scissors and tiny open knives.

She now took a ring from the table and put it on her finger.

'A new ring? Another charm?' he asked as he walked over to the bed.

She held out her hand to him. 'Perhaps. But it is not new.' It was an ugly old silver ring with a crest cut on a greenish stone and set in a cheap mounting.

'I found it yesterday in a junk shop on Second Avenue. The horrid man made me pay a hundred dollars for it when he saw that I was bound to have it. I just can't bargain—it is a pity.'

'The thing isn't worth fifty cents!' he cried.

'Yes, it is! It is worth more to me. Look—a pelican pricking open her breast to feed her young with her own blood.'

He looked at her sharply—again this idea! 'Why does it interest you?'

She shrugged her shoulders. 'Oh, it just does! It is the crest of Magdeburg—my mother's family came from there.'

She took from the table a tumbler filled to the brim with a milky liquid and offered it to him. 'Drink, my friend!'

'What is it?'

'Just a sleeping draught. I asked Dr. Cohn to mix it for me.'

He shook his head. 'No! Why should I need a sleeping draught?'

'Then I will drink it,' she said.

She raised the glass to her lips and drained it. 'One of us needs this—for tonight. You—if—— And I—if——'

She set the glass down, put her hands on his shoulders and smiled at him.

'You see—that is the way it is.'

'What do you mean: "If——?"' he cried impatiently. 'Lotte, tell me!'

She put her head against his so that her soft red curls played around his neck and chin. 'Don't ask me, please! You know that I won't say anything when I don't want to.'

She lifted her head, looked at him and grew sombre.

There was a great kindness in the deep cello-like tones of her voice. 'It is very difficult, what I am doing, Beloved—very difficult. But I do it gladly.'

'Just like my mother's voice,' he thought.

She pulled him over to the bed. 'Come—come—seize the short minutes. We have only half an hour—and then I will be fast asleep. I am yours when I am awake, Beloved—and still more when I am asleep. If you only knew how much——'

Kisses, kisses and embraces. At first he had been cool and reserved, but her dear warmth soon melted the snow. She kissed the rich soil of his heart and made flowers grow there—beautiful multi-hued blooms. They dripped from his lips, raining down on her, covering her and wrapping her in a cloak of flamboyant beauty.

Yes, he had loved her—loved her until she fell asleep in his kisses. She kept her eyes open as long as she could. 'Thank you,' she whispered as her lids drooped.

Exactly half an hour—just as she had said.

He had switched on the light and sat up beside her, looking at her quietly.

And all the happiness was gone—and there was again that

sneaking fever of terrible emptiness in his body. And in his brain there was again the suspicion—the gnawing suspicion——

Had she taken the draught to deceive him? Was she only waiting until he was asleep—in order to——

In order to—what? What?

He did not take his eyes off her, watching her in graven silence. He turned the light off and lay down, pretending to sleep—fighting his sleepiness with all his will-power.

He listened and waited—for hours.

But nothing happened. He could barely hear her breathing.

Then—at a late hour—he fell asleep.

He awoke very late, feeling fresh—and well! And stronger than he had been for months.

Lotte still lay as she had lain all night, covered up to her chin, sleeping soundly.

He got out of bed, took a bath, dressed, had breakfast and came back to her room. She was still sleeping.

He had driven home and called her up a few hours later. Her maid answered and told him that Mrs. van Ness was still sleeping. And Madame had given orders last night not to be disturbed until she should wake.

Suddenly he remembered something. The little scissors, the shiny sharp knives that she had put down on the table when he came into the room. He had planned to keep an eye on them—but later he forgot and did not look at them when he awoke in the morning.

What had they been for? What did she want with them? What had happened to them last night?

Had she, nevertheless—while he was asleep——?

But what—what could she have done?

He could not find an answer.

But the suspicion was there again, a definite, strong suspicion, clawing at his brain—holding him fast——

WITCHCRAFT IN RUSSIA

'A correspondent in Mexico City, Diego Vedras, has written to us about one of the most incredible events of the decade. Senor Vedras has befriended a refugee, a fear-stricken man who fled from behind the Iron Curtain.

The man's story is a strange one and most disconnected. A group of people, some of them obviously insane from the description, came together in his remote Siberian town. Fanatics, White Russians, demonists and madmen, they were united by a common goal. They sought the death of the man they felt responsible for all of Russia's woes—Josef Stalin.

Many ways were suggested but the plan decided to be the most feasible was the use of witchcraft. A devil doll was constructed with the proper ceremony and the first pin inserted.

This was the day that Stalin fell ill.

More pins were inserted until the final one penetrated the doll's heart. This was the day Stalin died. Word had leaked out about the group's operation and they were forced to flee.

The man lost all his baggage on his way to Mexico; he had only a small wax doll, its body transfixd by a score of pins.'

*Fate Magazine,
November 1963*

Invoker of the Beast

FEODOR SOLOGUB

I

It was quiet and tranquil, and neither joyous nor sad. There was an electric light in the room. The walls seemed impregnable. The window was overhung by heavy, dark-green draperies, even denser in tone than the green of the wall-paper. Both doors—the large one at the side, and the small one in the depth of the alcove that faced the window—were securely bolted. And there, behind them, reigned darkness and desolation in the broad corridor as well as in the spacious and cold reception-room, where melancholy plants yearned for their native soil.

Gurov was lying on the divan. A book was in his hands. He often paused in his reading. He meditated and mused during these pauses, and it was always about the same thing. Always about *them*.

They hovered near him. This he had noticed long ago. They were hiding. Their manner was importunate. They rustled very quietly. For a long time they remained invisible to the eye. But one day, when Gurov awoke rather tired, sad and pale, and languidly turned on the electric light to dissipate the greyish gloom of an early winter morning—he espied one of them suddenly.

Small, grey, shifty and nimble, *he* flashed by, and in the twinkling of an eye disappeared.

And thereafter, in the morning, or in the evening, Gurov grew used to seeing these small, shifty, house sprites run past him. This time he did not doubt that they would appear.

To begin with he felt a slight headache, afterwards a sudden flash of heat, then of cold. Then, out of the corner, there emerged the long, slender Fever with her ugly, yellow face and her bony dry hands; she lay down at his side, and embraced him, and fell to kissing him and to laughing. And these rapid kisses of the affec-

tionate and cunning Fever, and these slow approaches of the slight headache were agreeable.

Feebleness spread itself over the whole body, and lassitude also. This too was agreeable. It made him feel as though all the turmoil of life had receded into the distance. And people also became far away, unimportant, even unnecessary. He preferred to be with these quiet ones, these house sprites.

Gurov had not been out for some days. He had locked himself in at home. He did not permit any one to come to him. He was alone. He thought about them. He awaited them.

II

This tedious waiting was cut short in a strange and unexpected manner. He heard the slamming of a distant door, and presently he became aware of the sound of unhurried footfalls which came from the direction of the reception-room, just behind the door of his room. Someone was approaching with a sure and nimble step.

Gurov turned his head towards the door. A gust of cold entered the room. Before him stood a boy, most strange and wild in aspect. He was dressed in linen draperies, half-nude, barefoot, smooth-skinned, sun-tanned, with black tangled hair and dark, burning eyes. An amazingly perfect, handsome face; handsome to a degree which made it terrible to gaze upon its beauty. And it portrayed neither good nor evil.

Gurov was not astonished. A masterful mood took hold of him. He could hear the house sprites scampering away to conceal themselves.

The boy began to speak.

'Aristomarchon! Perhaps you have forgotten your promise? Is this the way of valiant men? You left me when I was in mortal danger, you had made a promise, which it is evident you did not intend to keep. I have sought for you such a long time! And here I have found you, living at your ease, and in luxury.'

Gurov fixed a perplexed gaze upon the half-nude, handsome lad; and turgid memories awoke in his soul. Something long since submerged arose in dim outlines and tormented his memory, which struggled to find a solution to the strange apparition; a solution, moreover, which seemed so near and so intimate.

And what of the invincibility of his walls? Something had happened round him, some mysterious transformation had taken place. But Gurov, engulfed in his vain exertions to recall something very near to him and yet slipping away in the tenacious embrace of ancient history, had not yet succeeded in grasping the

nature of the change that he felt had taken place. He turned to the wonderful boy.

'Tell me, gracious boy, simply and clearly, without unnecessary reproaches, what had I promised you, and when had I left you in a time of mortal danger? I swear to you, by all the holies, that my conscience could never have permitted me such a mean action as you reproach me with.'

The boy shook his head. In a sonorous voice, suggestive of the melodious outpouring of a stringed instrument, he said; 'Aristomarchon, you always have been a man skilful with words, and not less skilful in matters requiring daring and prudence. If I have said that you left me in a moment of mortal danger I did not intend it as a reproach, and I do not understand why you speak of your conscience. Our projected affair was difficult and dangerous, but who can hear us now; before whom, with your craftily arranged words and your dissembling ignorance of what happened this morning at sunrise, can you deny that you had given me a promise?'

The electric light grew dim. The ceiling seemed to darken and to recede into height. There was a smell of grass; its forgotten name, once long ago, suggested something gentle and joyous. A breeze blew. Gurov raised himself, and asked: 'What sort of an affair had we two contrived? Gracious boy, I deny nothing. Only I don't know what you are speaking of. I don't remember.'

Gurov felt as though the boy were looking at him, yet not directly. He felt also vaguely conscious of another presence no less unfamiliar and alien than that of this curious stranger, and it seemed to him that the unfamiliar form of this other presence coincided with his own form. An ancient soul, as it were, had taken possession of Gurov and enveloped him in the long-lost freshness of its vernal attributes.

It was growing darker, and there was increasing purity and coolness in the air. There rose up in his soul the joy and ease of pristine existence. The stars glowed brilliantly in the dark sky. The boy spoke.

'We had undertaken to kill the Beast. I tell you this under the multitudinous gaze of the all-seeing sky. Perhaps you were frightened. That's quite likely too! We had planned a great, terrible affair, that our names might be honoured by future generations.'

Soft, tranquil, and monotonous was the sound of a stream which purled its way in the nocturnal silence. The stream was invisible, but its nearness was soothing and refreshing. They stood under the broad shelter of a tree and continued the conversation begun at some other time.

Gurov asked: 'Why do you say that I had left you in a moment of mortal danger? Who am I that I should be frightened and run away?'

The boy burst into a laugh. His mirth had the sound of music, and as it passed into speech his voice still quavered with sweet, melodious laughter.

'Aristomarchon, how cleverly you feign to have forgotten all! I don't understand what makes you do this, and with such a mastery that you bring reproaches against yourself which I have not even dreamt of. You had left me in a moment of mortal danger because it had to be, and you could not have helped me otherwise than by forsaking me at the moment. You will surely not remain stubborn in your denial when I remind you of the words of the Oracle?'

Gurov suddenly remembered. A brilliant light, as it were, unexpectedly illumined the dark domain of things forgotten. And in wild ecstasy, in a loud and joyous voice, he exclaimed: 'One shall kill the Beast!'

The boy laughed. And Aristomarchon asked: 'Did you kill the Beast, Timarides?'

'With what?' exclaimed Timarides. 'However strong my hands are, I was not one who could kill the Beast with a blow of the fist. We, Aristomarchon, had not been prudent and we were unarmed. We were playing in the sand by the stream. The Beast came upon us suddenly and he laid his paw upon me. It was for me to offer up my life as a sweet sacrifice to glory and to a noble cause; it was for you to execute our plan. And while he was tormenting my defenceless and unresisting body, you, fleet-footed Aristomarchon, could have run for your lance, and killed the now blood-intoxicated Beast. But the Beast did not accept my sacrifice. I lay under him, quiescent and still, gazing into his bloodshot eyes. He held his heavy paw on my shoulder, his breath came in hot, uneven gasps, and he sent out low snarls. Afterwards, he put out his huge, hot tongue and licked my face; then he left me.'

'Where is he now?' asked Aristomarchon.

In a voice strangely tranquil and strangely sonorous in the quiet arrested stillness of the humid air, Timarides replied: 'He followed me. I do not know how long I have been wandering until I found you. He followed me. I led him on by the smell of my blood. I do not know why he has not touched me until now. But here I have enticed him to you. You had better get the weapon which you had hidden so carefully and kill the Beast, while I in my turn will leave you in the moment of mortal danger, eye to eye with the enraged creature. Here's luck to you, Aristomarchon!'

As soon as he uttered these words Timarides started to run. For a short time his cloak was visible in the darkness, a glimmering patch of white. And then he disappeared. In the same instant the air resounded with the savage bellowing of the Beast, and his ponderous tread became audible. Pushing aside the growth of shrubs there emerged from the darkness the huge, monstrous head of the Beast, flashing a livid fire out of its two enormous, flaming eyes. And in the dark silence of nocturnal trees the towering ferocious shape of the Beast loomed ominously as it approached Aristomarchon.

Terror filled Aristomarchon's heart.

'Where is the lance?' was the thought that quickly flashed across his brain.

And in that instant, feeling the fresh night breeze on his face, Aristomarchon realized that he was running from the Beast. His ponderous springs and his spasmodic roars resounded closer and closer behind him. And as the Beast came up with him a loud cry rent the silence of the night. The cry came from Aristomarchon, who, recalling then some ancient and terrible words, pronounced loudly the incantation of the walls.

And thus enchanted the walls erected themselves around him. . . .

III

Enchanted, the walls stood firm and were lit up. A dreary light was cast upon them by the dismal electric lamp. Gurov was in his usual surroundings.

Again came the nimble Fever and kissed him with her yellow, dry lips, and caressed him with her dry, bony hands, which exhaled heat and cold. The same thin volume, with its white pages, lay on the little table beside the divan where, as before, Gurov rested in the caressing embrace of the affectionate Fever, who showered upon him her rapid kisses. And again there stood beside him, laughing and rustling, the tiny house sprites.

Gurov said loudly and indifferently: 'The incantation of the walls!'

Then he paused. But in what consisted this incantation? He had forgotten the words. Or had they never existed at all?

The little, shifty, grey demons danced round the slender volume with its ghostly white pages, and kept on repeating with their rustling voices: 'Our walls are strong. We are in the walls. We have nothing to fear from the outside.'

In their midst stood one of them, a tiny object like themselves, yet different from the rest. He was all black. His mantle fell from his shoulders in folds of smoke and flame. His eyes flashed like

lightning. Terror and joy alternated quickly.

Gurov spoke: 'Who are you?'

The black demon answered. 'I am the Invoker of the Beast. In one of your long-past existences you left the lacerated body of Timarides on the banks of a forest stream. The Beast had satiated himself on the beautiful body of your friend; he had gorged himself on the flesh that might have partaken of the fullness of earthly happiness; a creature of superhuman perfection had perished in order to gratify for a moment the appetite of the ravenous and ever insatiable Beast. And the blood, the wonderful blood, the sacred wine of happiness and joy, the wine of superhuman bliss—what had been the fate of this wonderful blood? Alas! The thirsty, ceaselessly thirsty Beast drank of it to gratify his momentary desire, and is thirsty anew. You had left the body of Timarides, mutilated by the Beast, on the banks of the forest stream; you forgot the promise you had given your valorous friend, and even the words of the ancient Oracle had not banished fear from your heart. And do you think that you are safe, that the Beast will not find you?'

There was austerity in the sound of his voice. While he was speaking the house sprites gradually ceased their dance; the little, grey house sprites stopped to listen to the Invoker of the Beast.

Gurov then said in reply: 'I am not worried about the Beast! I have pronounced eternal enchantment upon my walls and the Beast shall never penetrate hither, into my enclosure.'

The little grey ones were overjoyed, their voices tinkled with merriment and laughter; having gathered round, hand in hand, in a circle, they were on the point of bursting forth once more into dance, when the voice of the Invoker of the Beast rang out again, sharp and austere.

'But I am here. I am here because I have found you. I am here because the incantation of the walls is dead. I am here because Timarides is waiting and importuning me. Do you hear the gentle laugh of the brave, trusting lad? Do you hear the terrible bellowing of the Beast?'

From behind the wall, approaching nearer, could be heard the fearsome bellowing of the Beast.

'The Beast is bellowing behind the wall, the invincible wall!' exclaimed Gurov in terror. 'My walls are enchanted for ever, and impregnable against foes.'

Then spoke the black demon, and there was an imperious ring in his voice: 'I tell you, man, the incantation of the walls is dead. And if you think you can save yourself by pronouncing the incantation of the walls, why then don't you utter the words?'

A cold shiver passed down Gurov's spine. The incantation! He had forgotten the words of the ancient spell. And what mattered it? Was not the ancient incantation dead—dead?

Everything about him confirmed with irrefutable evidence the death of the ancient incantation of the walls—because the walls, and the light and the shade which fell upon them, seemed dead and wavering. The Invoker of the Beast spoke terrible words. And Gurov's mind was now in a whirl, now in pain, and the affectionate Fever did not cease to torment him with her passionate kisses. Terrible words resounded, almost deadening his senses—while the Invoker of the Beast grew larger and larger, and hot fumes breathed from him, and grim terror. His eyes ejected fire, and when at last he grew so tall as to screen off the electric light, his black cloak suddenly fell from his shoulders. And Gurov recognized him—it was the boy Timarides.

'Will you kill the Beast?' asked Timarides in a sonorous voice. 'I have enticed him, I have led him to you, I have destroyed the incantation of the walls. The cowardly gift of inimical gods, the incantation of the walls, had turned into naught my sacrifice, and had saved you from your action. But the ancient incantation of the walls is dead—be quick, then, to take hold of your sword and kill the Beast. I have been a boy—I have become the Invoker of the Beast. He had drunk of my blood, and now he thirsts anew; he had partaken also of my flesh, and he is hungry again, the insatiable, pitiless Beast. I have called him to you, and you, in fulfilment of your promise, may kill the Beast. Or die yourself.'

He vanished. A terrible bellowing shook the walls. A gust of icy moisture blew across to Gurov.

The wall facing the spot where Gurov lay opened, and the huge, ferocious and monstrous Beast entered. Bellowing savagely, he approached Gurov and laid his ponderous paw upon his breast. Straight into his heart plunged the pitiless claws. A terrible pain shot through his whole body. Shifting his blood-red eyes the Beast inclined his head towards Gurov and, crumbling the bones of his victim with his teeth, began to devour his yet-palpitating heart.

AFRICAN WITCHCRAFT GOES TO WAR

Witchcraft has allied itself to revolution in Africa. I realized this when I landed recently in an area of the Eastern Congo held by rebel forces against the government. Witchcraft was putting the clock back and playing politics with the superstitions of the past.

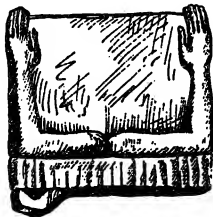
I met this witchcraft opposition when a posse of Bahembi warriors converged upon me clothed in garments prescribed by their witch doctors to make them invulnerable to the bullets of the government.

It was from them that I learned the ritual of the "Dhawa" or witchcraft which sustained them in their rapid campaigns in the Eastern Congo. Basically it was a cult of swearing oaths of allegiance and drinking certain potions brewed by the witch doctors. These potions were principally a drug known as chanvre or blue lotus.

This plant juice creates a wild exhilaration and immunity to fear and pain. As one battle eye-witness told me, "The onrush of men having eaten blue lotus was not affected by bullets striking them in the body. I saw one man still advance after four heavy calibre revolver bullets had struck him, and he fell only a few feet from me."

IAN COLVIN,

The Daily Telegraph, August 1965



Night of the Leopard

WILLIAM SAMBROT

The trouble started the moment we set foot inside the village of Koluma.

There were four of us, members of the Peace Corps, who'd been sent to the new African nation of Sierra Leone: Jacob Tannenbaum, a bearded pre-med from NYU; an expert oboe player, jazzophile with a complete catalogue of everything Thelonius Monk had ever done. There was Michael Fallon from Oregon State, a B.A. in Forestry; redhead, freckled, a dead-ringer for a youthful Arthur Godfrey. There was Eunice Gantly, a B.A. in Sociology, a beautiful Negro Girl born in Oakland, California, a grad of U.C., at Berkeley.

And lastly, there was myself, Bob Metzger, with an M.A. in Math, if you please, and fully aware I'd never use any part of it in the village of Koluma, deep in an indigenous rain forest near the Guinean-Liberian Border. Kono-tribe territory. Far beyond the railhead, where primitive Africa really took over. Bush country.

We knew, as well as six weeks' briefing could tell us, just what we were getting into. We knew that Koluma lay in the heart of a country of festering swamps, plateaus, and remnants of immense rain forests. A country where rain exceeded ten feet—when it rained. A country where children have one chance in four of living to maturity. Where the women begin aging at fourteen and die of unremitting childbirth and labour before they're forty. Where trachoma, frambesia, elephantiasis and the tsetse fly are the norm. Where the tribal chiefs still exercise feudal life or death power.

A breathtakingly beautiful country, where the superstitions of a thousand generations hold the natives in unbreakable thrall: where they fear to walk the forest at night because God is a

leopard who eats their souls and mangles their bodies—and the witch doctor his earthly representative. Only he roamed the night—in many forms.

The witch doctor. They didn't tell us much about him, at the briefings, back at the big clean U.C. campus in Berkeley. But we learned of him in a hurry—and his power—the hard way, the moment we stepped foot in Koluma.

In Sefadue, the last town of any size before hitting the bush country, we were met by Father Everett, a Maryknoll priest. An American, he ran a tiny mission not far from Koluma. He'd spent thirty years in the bush, struggling to bring a ray of light into the primeval darkness of that area. A lean, gentle-eyed man, he and his grizzled old Negro assistant, Job, had walked out of the bush to volunteer us his services.

He smiled, shaking our hands, and holding Eunice's hands in both his for a long time, he studied her intently. 'You have strength,' he told her. 'Do you know, I believe you sprang from a Nilotic-Hamitic ancestry. I'd almost swear—Masai.'

She laughed, her deep throaty laugh, her brilliant eyes sparkling. 'Straight Mississippi, Father,' she said. 'For over two hundred years, now.'

'I meant—before that,' he said gently. 'They know the lions of Africa—the Masai—even here,' he said. His sunken eyes probed our faces, measuring our bodies. 'You are beautiful souls,' he said. 'I've forgotten how wonderful a young healthy body can be. You've all had your shots; you know about the malaria here?'

We groaned in unison, and Father Everett smiled his brief melancholy smile. Job helped us with our gear; we had a miniature caravan of two used but serviceable jeeps, piled high with our possessions—two years' worth.

Job was aptly named; he suffered every imaginable woe and pain, but worked indefatigably; meanwhile keeping up a stream of conversation in a broad if broken English accent. Sierra Leone was for many years a British protectorate; many of the colony natives speak a passable brand of English. Others use pidgin only. In the bush country, they speak their own language.

We moved out, heading north-east, through vast open savannahs, still thick with game; over burnt-out grasslands, moving up and east, through second-growth bush country, and finally, plunging into the indigenous rain forest which extended from here hundreds of miles east into Guinea and Liberia.

Narrow trails, barely wide enough for the jeeps, were our only roads. This was truly primitive country. And as we bumped along, Father Everett told us what to expect in Koluma.

'The first person you must meet in your village will be Oturu—he's the chief and the village medicine-man.'

'The local witch doctor?' I smiled.

He gave me a sharp look. 'He's the reason I wanted to meet you—to prepare you for him.' He spoke seriously. 'Don't make the mistake of under-rating him. He's of the Mende tribe; he's been to school in Freetown and speaks excellent English. But juju—magic—is his real business. His villagers fear his powers with a superstitious awe—and he works on their fears ruthlessly. The man's an utter despot.'

We stared at him, somewhat sceptically, and he said, 'He's very opposed to your coming—and you can understand why. You represent another kind of magic—one which could topple him. So I strongly urge you to do nothing which could give him reason to—to harm you—or your cause.'

'He's what's wrong with Africa,' Eunice said hotly. 'He's educated; he knows what he's doing is detrimental to his own people. He's a common crook, sponging off their superstitious fears, keeping them in abject misery and ignorance for his own gain.' Her dark eyes flashed. 'He's despicable. You can bet your bottom buck I'll do everything I can to topple him.'

Father Everett seemed distressed at her outburst. 'You don't understand,' he said. 'His powers are real—very real. He—' he glanced toward Job in the next jeep '—he's rumoured to be a ranking chief of the Tongo Players—an outlawed group. Human leopards. To even mention them is tabu to the natives. To see one after dark means death to them—and many have died that way—mauled and torn to bits.'

Eunice looked askance. 'You sound as though you believe that rubbish, Father.' He hesitated, looking troubled. 'It's not important what I believe,' he told her. 'I—I'm white, from a different world. What is important is that these people do believe, and with an unshaken belief rooted in time immemorial. *They believe*—and so things happen to them which go beyond explanation.'

He told us, as the jeeps bumped along and shadows lengthened, how their entire lives were ruled from birth to death by the makers of medicine—good or bad. Their unshakable belief in the powers of the witch doctor: that he could wither an eye, an arm, or even stop their hearts from beating, if they incurred his displeasure.

Father Everett told us of the natives' belief in black magic; how evil ones could lie in their huts at night, while their spirit rose to fly great distances. Of their terror of these evil ones who had the

power to change their forms, to become alligators, baboons, and, most feared, leopards. Roaming the night, feasting on human victims.

We reached Koluma as the low-slanting rays of the sun pierced the tall trees. It was a scattering of huts underneath the gigantic flower-hung trees, like an open sewer in the midst of paradise. The smell was overpowering, and for the first time I realized the seriousness of the job we'd so blithely undertaken six weeks ago.

Every inch of ground about the huts was piled with offal, crawling with maggots, swarming with flies. Scrawny pigs rooted in the garbage, tick-infested chickens pecked and scurried underfoot. Flea-ridden curs snarled and yapped over tidbits, while everywhere the children tumbled, picking up dirt-encrusted scraps, eating them with apparent relish. Children with swollen stomachs, rickety legs, open sores, running diseased eyes. Ribs showing, teeth missing. Mothers, barely in their teens, with breasts already withered, dangling grotesquely. Men stood about on one leg, the other cocked up against their inner knee, like meditative storks, gaping lackadaisically, the soles of their feet pitted with yaws.

We gazed about, silent. There were tears in Eunice's eyes.

The jeeps stopped before a great Yairi tree. Underneath the tree was a crudely carved image of a pot-bellied creature with the head of an animal, but the arms and legs of a human. Cruel claws extended from the fingers and toes of the idol, and a long tail dropped behind it.

Flies buzzed blackly about the image, and piled up before it were putrid bits of flesh, decayed vegetables, fish-heads and spoiled fruit. From the tree dangled bits of glass and metal—obviously offerings to the village deity.

'That would be his obeah,' Eunice said bitterly.

'The leopard god,' Father Everett said. 'And that hut next to it belongs to Oturu, the witch doctor.'

We got out of the jeeps, and, as we moved toward Oturu's hut, I noticed the villagers remained at a distance instead of swarming around as we'd expected. I looked at Father Everett. 'They don't seem very glad to see us, Father.'

He nodded shortly. 'They're not.'

A man stepped out of the large hut near the obeah. 'Oturu,' Father Everett murmured.

He was tall, and strongly built, lighter than the others—nearly as light as Eunice. He came close and I saw then how really big he was. I'm six two and he towered a good half a foot over me. He approached us, and at a curt word from him the

villagers who'd surged forward, now faded back respectfully.

He was dressed plainly, in sun-faded khaki shorts, a sleeveless cotton shirt, his long muscular arms bulging the armholes. A cord around his neck held two curving yellowish tusks—the incisors of a great cat. He radiated controlled power. His eyes glittered as he raked us with a keen glance, lingering longest on Eunice.

We stared at him, fascinated. Eunice had cool disdain on her face—but—I saw the flickering in her eyes; a brief hint of fear she suppressed immediately.

Father Everett said something, obviously ceremonious, in a slow guttural tongue, but Oturu gave him a cold look of thinly concealed hatred, cutting him short with a burst of harsh language. His voice was deep, vibrant with power.

'What does he say?' Eunice asked.

Oturu looked at her, and his eyes burned. 'I told the white father that I've thrown the bones,' Oturu said in an incongruous British accent.

'A form of divination,' Father Everett said, 'which shows your presence here is not welcome.'

'The bones say there will be much sorrow to the people if these Americans remain here,' Oturu said.

Eunice laughed aloud, a hard ringing contemptuous sound. The villagers murmured, drawing closer.

'I can understand how our presence here might be bad medicine for you—but it can only bring good for these people.' She put her slim hands on her hips. 'We're here at the request of the government in Freetown. We have their invitation in writing to settle in here, to live with the people and aid them in any way we can.' She leaned forward, eyes snapping. 'We didn't come seven thousand miles just to go back because your bones say we're bad medicine.'

Oturu's thick brows drew together, but his voice was controlled as he rumbled, 'I have no more to say. The bones never lie. If you stay, the wrath of our grandfather, the leopard, will be terrible.'

'I do not fear your leopard,' Eunice said, projecting her voice so that those in the crowd who might understand English would certainly hear her. She whirled, took a lipstick from her pocket and with two rapid strokes she drew a brilliant red cross on the protruding pot-belly of the obeah. The villagers, watching intently, gave a gasp and fell back.

Eunice turned to face them, her aristocratic features boldly challenging. 'Since when does the daughter of the lion fear the leopard?' She threw off her jacket and stood before the obeah,

tall, strikingly beautiful, and I saw Father Everett bow his head. An excited rumble passed among the villagers.

Oturu impaled Eunice with eyes that seemed suddenly dusty. She shrank back imperceptibly, but returned his look bravely.

'Now there will be many souls eaten,' he said. 'Theirs—' he gestured toward the villagers '—and yours.' He stalked back into his hut.

Seconds later the villagers had melted from sight; only the pigs grunted on the little square. Even the curs had slunk away as though scenting a brewing storm.

That night, we sat around the small fire, while the wind moaned in the towering trees. Before the obeah, the bits of metal and glass jangled. And suddenly the dim paleolithic figure of Oturu loomed there. In the flickering light, he seemed to be carrying a large stick, or club, draped with fur, and a small bag that rattled. He pointed the stick in the direction of the hut Eunice occupied alone, and his harsh gutturals were faintly audible to us.

He bent over the miniature altar before the obeah, stamping his feet, gesturing, rattling his bag. When Oturu was through, he walked away, and suddenly, from the depths of the dark forest, we heard the weird coughing grunt of some animal.

'Leopard,' Job whispered.

Father Everett rose and walked quickly to the obeah. We saw him take something from the little altar. When he returned, his face was like carved stone in the firelight.

'What was that all about?' Tannenbaum asked uneasily.

Father Everett held up a small object. 'It is evil,' he said, after a long moment. 'A juju—an offering of a soul to placate the leopard god.'

We studied the object. It was a crude doll-like figure, with tiny curved thorns, like miniature claws, piercing the eyes, the heart, and the loins. The moulded clay face was unmistakable.

'Eunice,' I said.

'Yes,' Father Everett said. Abruptly he tossed the object into the fire, and strode toward Eunice's hut. He knocked, and in a moment, vanished inside.

And finally, Tannenbaum, the pre-med (here, in this remote rain forest, his beard dark against his white face, NYU another planet, almost), Tannenbaum suddenly rose, kicked angrily at a log lying askew, and went into our hut. A few moments later his battery-operated phonograph began booming out, a swinging Thelonious Monk bit; chaotic, richly melodic, as only the Monk can play—but somehow right, here with the stars obscured by immense trees,

bending close, the strange scents and sounds of the African forest. Here, after all, was the genesis of such music. And it, too, was a form of magic—but good magic.

The next morning Father Everett left us, clasping us each in a brief warm hug. And it was, after he'd gone that I saw Eunice was wearing a heavy silver crucifix against her honey-coloured neck. There were shadows under her eyes.

The villagers avoided us that day, although we began the first of the many simple, easily-imitated improvements we'd planned for the village—a deep, wide, sheltered latrine, with a pile of soft loose earth and hand-carved paddle-shaped shovels with which to throw loose dirt into the latrines after use. Primitive, but effective, sanitary cover.

For the next two nights, although we watched until long into the night, we spotted no one under the Yairi tree—but found each morning another crude figure of Eunice, pierced with thorn-claws. And daily, Eunice, strained-looking, moved about among the women, observing their way of life, saying nothing, aware that they were waiting to see the outcome of her clash of wills with Oturu. Her crucifix, like a magnet, drew their frightened glances.

But Tannenbaum got the first breakthrough. Or rather, Thelonious Monk, with an assist from Lester Young and Charlie 'Bird' Parker. On the third day, with still no souls having been eaten, the villagers relaxed their attitudes. Tannenbaum drew a sizeable collection of thoughtful, appreciative listeners to his canned jazz concert.

One old man in particular, with an open running sore on his wizened leg, hopped about and clapped in rhythm. His ulcerated leg was plastered with a disgusting poultice of ground-up bones, mud, spittle and other unmentionables, liberally sprinkled with flies.

Tannenbaum, emerging from changing records, saw the old man and beckoned for him to come closer. Cautiously, the oldster came nearer, and Tannenbaum looked at the leg. He shook his head gravely, then pushed the old man onto a log and stretched the leg out. The old man cast an anxious glance toward Oturu's hut, but when Tannenbaum began cleaning the ulcer, the old man submitted quietly. I saw he was looking over Tannenbaum's shoulder. I turned. Eunice stood there, smiling, the heavy silver crucifix at her neck winking softly.

That night the wind rose again; the moon, nearly full, scudded from tree to tree. And even though I waited up for hours, peering toward the obeah, I didn't see Oturu—or anyone else. But later,

much later, we heard the wild screams from the deep woods, just beyond the village.

And in the morning, the body of the old man Tannenbaum had treated was found, on the edge of the deep forest. It was terribly mutilated and mauled, apparently by a leopard. The leg that had been neatly bandaged was torn completely off.

All that day, the villagers stayed in their huts; the body of the old man, straw-shrouded, lay before the obeah. Oturu was not to be seen. We prowled the forest outside the village area, rifles ready, but to our untrained eyes, nothing was visible.

That night, as quietly as he'd left, Father Everett returned, slipping into the village with Job, his assistant. He went directly to Oturu's hut.

We were waiting for him, when he came out, but he gestured for us to wait, and he went into Eunice's hut. He was there for a long time, and when he came out, his face was grave; and pale.

'Oturu says the old one's soul was eaten by the leopard god for submitting to the white man's magic.' He ran a tired hand over his face. 'Of course there'll be more of this unless Eunice—and you—leave. That bit of information was revealed to him by his faithful bones.'

'But—we just can't walk out on these people now,' I protested. 'There must be something we can do to stop this.'

He meditatively fingered the heavy black crucifix he wore, then he said in a low voice, 'Job tells me that the tracks of an enormous leopard lead from the scene of the kill into the village—and disappear. The villagers know this and they're in mortal terror, poor souls. They say it's a spirit-leopard.'

We looked at one another. 'Listen, I said urgently, 'I'm a damned good shot, if I do say so—I made expert in the Marine Corps. I don't know too much about them, but don't leopards always come back to their kill? Let's buy a goat or a pig from someone here, kill it and put it in the same spot. I'll get up a tree with my big flashlight, and—'

Father Everett shook his head. 'This leopard will never be caught that way.' He stopped and looked beyond us.

We turned. Eunice stood in the doorway of her hut, and I saw again how terribly drawn and exhausted she looked. I noticed for the first time she wasn't wearing her silver crucifix. Her neck looked oddly vulnerable, without it. She nodded slowly to Father Everett.

He took a deep breath. 'I'll need one of your rifle bullets,' he said to me. 'You have a good flashlight?' I nodded. He turned to Fallon and Tannenbaum. 'Tonight, please stay in your huts—no

matter what you might hear in Eunice's hut—or elsewhere. This is a job for just two of us.' He was very sad, and solemn when he said, 'Nothing must be done to frighten the—the leopard off.'

I brought him one of my .375 magnum bullets—300 grains of killing power, and he tucked it into his palm, not looking at it. He said to me, 'Stay away from Eunice's hut. I'll come for you—and your rifle—the back way. Until then—God be with you.' He walked away and went into Eunice's hut. In a few minutes we heard muffled tapping sounds. Nothing else. . . .

Father Everett and I crouched beyond the obeh, down the twisting trail that led into the rain forest, near the spot where the old man had been so cruelly killed. We stood motionless behind the smooth bole of an immense Yairi tree while the brilliant moon dappled the forest floor, and shadows swam like underwater images. We waited, looking not toward the forest—but back, toward the village.

Earlier, Father Everett had tapped at the back of our hut and whispered for me to follow. I'd gone out the tiny rear window, wriggling carefully, handing out my rifle and flashlight. I heard a click as Father slid back the bolt and slipped in a bullet, then he rammed it home. And afterward, we'd made our way in a circle, skirting the entire village, to take up our place on the forest edge.

We waited. The jungle roared; and suddenly, all sound stopped. There came a rending noise from the village and Father Everett gripped my arm. I sensed he was shifting the flashlight, bringing it up, ready to snap on.

I waited tensely, blood pounding in my head, and then we heard it, a yeowrring, a coughing grunt or two, and the sound of soft scuffling, as though some large creatures were rolling in the leaves. More sounds, and then the eyes, glowing, greenish—two pairs of eyes.

Abruptly the flashlight was a blazing beacon, and Father Everett was roaring in my ears, 'The big one, the big one. *Shoot now, for the love of Jesus Christ!*'

Two leopards crouched there, transfixed in the bright light, enormous, their pelts glowing softly, the huge spots brilliant in the beam, feral eyes like nothing I've ever dreamed in my worst nightmares, unblinking, wide, glaring. And the immense male, mouth wide open, huge incisors glistening wetly, red tongue lolling out, lips drawn back in a sneer.

It coughed, crouched; I brought the rifle up and without conscious aim fired. The heavy recoil jarred me back. In that same instant the great leopard gave a scream that could only have been

human, reared back, crashed down, thrashed around, coughing, yowling, snapping in ferocious rage.

The smaller leopard spun, bounded away, and the light was snapped off. We stood there, blinking, blinded, while the awful snapping, coughing sounds continued, as the animal fought to live. And finally, a grunt, a sigh, a diminishing sound of thrashing—a thump—and stillness. And from beyond, in the direction of the village, a terrible scream, shrill, high, impossibly higher, then it died.

The light came on again and Father Everett went crashing back down the trail. I followed him, gun at the ready. When I reached the clearing, near the obeah, I found Father Everett kneeling on the ground, holding Eunice in his arms. Her rich skin was an unbelievable ivory, her eyes rolled completely back in her head.

'Take her back to her hut. Whisky, if you have it,' he said hastily. 'Circulation. Rub her well.' He stood up and made a quick little gesture over her with his hand—the sign of the cross. Then he rushed off back down the trail, still carrying my flashlight.

I picked her up—she was surprisingly light for such a tall girl, and staggered back with her to her hut. Nothing moved in the village. I put her down on her pallet and bustled about, getting her some medicinal alcohol, trying to pour some down her throat. She coughed, opened dull eyes, obviously deep in shock, and while I rubbed her, she talked.

'It was just like the other three times I told you about, Father,' she whispered, looking at me with glazed eyes, thinking I was Father Everett. 'That tugging, that feeling that I must go—must go. But before—I had the crucifix, and I resisted. This time—This time—' She closed her eyes and her voice went on, while I listened, horror chilling me, despite the heat and humidity.

She had awakened (Eunice murmured, while I rubbed her wrists and massaged her shoulders), aware that the full moon was shining through the little window. The hot heavy night of Africa swept over her, full of sounds, voluptuous scents. She stretched deliciously and glided off the bed and to the window. *He* was out there, on the edge of the forest, calling her—calling her.

With a sudden unpremeditated movement she lunged at the small opening. It burst open with a rending of rotten wood and in an instant she was outside, looking back at the small hut, bathed in the flood of cold pearly moonlight. Somewhere beyond the village, in the velvet blackness, an animal coughed, a sound she instantly recognized.

There in the trees she saw the green eyes glowing at her, the

slow gentle twitching of a long powerful tail, then the sinuous step by step of an immense leopard approaching.

She waited, watching this great soft-stepping creature that came nearer and nearer. She felt no fear; no surprise to note that she had claws, that he was on all fours, and enfolded in rich spotted fur. No surprise at all. She looked deeply into the eyes of the huge male leopard and she knew him.

He was next to her, rubbing his muzzle against her shoulder, breathing softly in her ear. He became more insistent, and suddenly angered, she crouched on her haunches and brought up a paw in a quick slashing motion to the leopard's muzzle. Her claws raked down one side from ear to shoulder in a lightning gesture. The leopard yowled with pain, bounding back.

But in an instant it was next to her again, rubbing against her, oblivious of the bright red streak of blood that marred its stunning spotted fur. She purred, a deep soft rumbling sound, half acceptance, half warning. They turned, and shoulder to shoulder, heads swinging right and left, accepting the fact that they were creatures of the night, and supreme, that soft things awaited them to be torn and rended, with salty blood theirs for the taking—together they ambled into the dark forest.

'And then—and then,' her eyes opened, Eunice winced, clutched at me, fell back, her hands squeezing at her forehead. 'There was a light, a bright light. And a sound—a voice, a terrible roaring voice—And I ran. I ran—and it hit me—it hit me—' She wrenched out from under my hands, clasping her breasts, gasping with great pain.

'I woke up,' she panted. 'And—it must have been the dream again—only, it was so real. And I was—I was outside.' She got up on an elbow, peering at me, puzzled.

'Bob? I thought—Father Everett?' She looked around, and at that moment the brilliant beam of my flashlight came into the room. She sat up, terror glared from her eyes as she looked into it. She fumbled at her neck, feeling for her missing crucifix, and the beam snapped off.

'It's all right, Eunice.' Father Everett stooped over her, bringing with him the scent of incense, of forest mould—and of fresh blood. 'You've just had a terrible nightmare—you mustn't worry. It's over.'

'That dream—the one I told you about—it came again, Father,' she murmured, suddenly sleepy. 'I thought—' She was asleep, then, making little gasping sounds as she breathed.

'I'll need your help for just a little bit more, Bob,' Father Everett said to me, taking my arm. I reached for my rifle but he restrained me. 'You won't need that—not anymore.'

We went back down the twisted trail, the bright beam of the light picking out huge flowers, pallid, unnatural looking. We were silent until we approached the spot where I'd shot the animal.

'Is it dead?' I said, although I knew it was.

'Yes,' he said grimly, 'The beast is dead.'

It was lying up against the bole of a tree, the eyes half open, glittering in the flashlight, and then my heart gave a fearful leap; the hairs on my neck stood up and I shivered with a terrible chill. It was no leopard lying there, blood still oozing from a big hole in the chest where that 300 grains had gone in and expanded inside. It was Oturu.

He lay there, lips skinned back in a death grin. He was wearing a magnificent leopard skin, the head of the animal just behind his own, the great mouth open, yellow incisors gleaming wickedly, a red tongue, stiff, lolling out. The fore-legs of the animal had been tied to his own arms, and the animal's leg skins tied to his own legs; the claws dangling, menacing, needle-sharp. The long tail coiled behind, lifelike, seeming still to twitch.

'My God—it's impossible. I couldn't have made that kind of a mistake. It was a *leopard* I shot. Not a man in a skin. I saw it—them. Two of them. A big leopard and—and—' I stopped. I looked at Father Everett. He was holding his heavy crucifix again, I noticed there was blood on his robes.

'That dream—Eunice told me about her dream. But it wasn't a dream, was it Father? It was real. *She was the other leopard*. Oh God! How can it be?'

He held the light away from us, and his grave face, peaceful now, was reflected strongly in the subdued rays. He looked at something he held in his hand, something curiously flattened and battered that reflected the flash beam.

'You can choose to believe one of two things, Bob. That you were a prime participant in a struggle between the forces of light and the dark forces of evil that still bind Africa with chains so powerful they can reach back over two hundred years—to a girl born in America, of undiluted African blood.' His hand clenched tight around the misshapen object. 'A girl so courageous—so filled with love, she was willing to risk her immortal soul to help break those chains.'

He looked piercingly at me. 'Or—you can believe that what happened here tonight was all a ghastly but perfectly understandable mistake.' He cleared his throat. 'After all, an old villager *was* mauled and killed hereabouts by a leopard last night. We *were* hunting it—and Oturu had the bad luck to be prowling in

the immediate area — wearing an outlawed leopard skin — at night.'

'But—the other leopard. There were two of them—'

'Call it—coincidence,' he said softly. He put a hand on my shoulder. 'Whatever you choose to believe, only remember this and be comforted: a great evil has been eradicated here and a village set on a path that leads only one way—upward, out of primeval darkness.'

'I—I don't know what to believe, Father. I'm only sure of one thing—this is Oturu's body. He's dead—and I shot him.' I looked down at Oturu, grinning starkly in death. 'The villagers believed he was invulnerable.'

'Only against the common forms of death,' Father said. 'They also believe that when their witch doctor is out in the spirit, a stronger spirit can kill him—using certain magic amulets—a silver bullet, for example.'

I started, and then reached for the dully gleaming lump of metal he was holding. I examined it closely. It wasn't the remnants of an ordinary .375 magnum bullet.

'It's silver, isn't it?' I stared at him. He nodded. I remembered the tapping sounds that came from Eunice's hut earlier in the night, and suddenly I had the complete picture. 'This was Eunice's crucifix—the one you gave her that first night.'

'Yes,' he said, 'Her one protection against the beast. She gave it to me to use. Offering herself as the lure.' He rolled it in his fingers. 'But it can be recast. When the villagers learn what happened here tonight they'll expect Eunice to be wearing it again. For their sakes, I hope she will. They need her kind of magic.'

He tucked the battered silver bullet into a pocket, then said, 'We'd better get started carrying the body back. It's best to put it in his hut before daybreak—for various reasons.'

I nodded and stooped to take Oturu's shoulders, and I saw the still-glistening blood on a long thin curving scratch down the side of his face and neck, continuing down onto the dark skin of his broad shoulder. A scratch as though made by a big angry cat with sharp claws.

Then again—it might only have been a thorn scratch—which is what I choose to believe . . .

BRAZIL'S VODOO FURORE

'Brazil's two major television networks have agreed to upgrade the level of their programmes, following controversial appearances by a voodoo priestess.

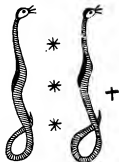
The Globo and Associados networks pledged last week to prohibit the presentation of "pictures, facts or persons that tend to exploit low beliefs or incite superstition".

A furore arose after a woman claiming to be the reincarnation of a voodoo spirit called "Seu Sete" or Mr. 77 went into wild trances on the two most popular Sunday variety programmes.

Imbibing a powerful alcoholic drink called cachacha and smoking cigars, Mrs. Cacilda de Assis, 48, told TV audiences she was the personification of "Seu Sete" and asked viewers to receive the spirit with her. As she dove to the floor in a frenzy, many members of the studio audience jumped from their seats and went into trances.

Several voodoo-like cults are widely practised in Brazil.'

Associated Press,
September 1971



The Circular Ruins

JORGE LUIS BORGES

Nobody saw him come ashore in the encompassing night, nobody saw the bamboo craft run aground in the sacred mud, but within a few days everyone knew that the quiet man had come from the south and that his home was among the numberless villages upstream on the steep slopes of the mountain, where the Zend language is barely tainted by Greek and where lepers are rare. The fact is that the grey man pressed his lips to the mud, scrambled up the bank without parting (perhaps without feeling) the brushy thorns that tore his flesh, and dragged himself, faint and bleeding, to the circular opening watched over by a stone tiger, or horse, which once was the colour of fire and is now the colour of ash. This opening is a temple which was destroyed ages ago by flames, which the swampy wilderness later desecrated, and whose god no longer receives the reverence of men. The stranger laid himself down at the foot of the image.

Wakened by the sun high overhead, he noticed—somehow without amazement—that his wounds had healed. He shut his pale eyes and slept again, not because of weariness but because he willed it. He knew that this temple was the place he needed for his unswerving purpose; he knew that downstream the encroaching trees had also failed to choke the ruins of another auspicious temple with its own fire-ravaged, dead gods; he knew that his first duty was to sleep. Along about midnight, he was awakened by the forlorn call of a bird. Footprints, some figs, and a water jug told him that men who lived nearby had looked on his sleep with a kind of awe and either sought his protection or else were in dread of his witchcraft. He felt the chill of fear and searched the crumbling walls for a burial niche, where he covered himself over with leaves he had never seen before.

His guiding purpose, though it was supernatural, was not im-

possible. He wanted to dream a man; he wanted to dream him down to the last detail and project him into the world of reality. This mystical aim had taxed the whole range of his mind. Had anyone asked him his own name or anything about his life before then, he would not have known what to answer. This forsaken, broken temple suited him because it held few visible things, and also because the neighbouring villagers would look after his frugal needs. The rice and fruit of their offerings were nourishment enough for his body, whose one task was to sleep and to dream.

At the outset, his dreams were chaotic; later on, they were of a dialectic nature. The stranger dreamed himself at the centre of a circular amphitheatre which in some way was also the burnt-out temple. Crowds of silent disciples exhausted the tiers of seats; the vases of the farthest of them hung centuries away from him and at a height of the stars, but their features were clear and exact. The man lectured on anatomy, cosmography, and witchcraft. The faces of the farthest of them hung centuries away from him and sibly, as if they felt the importance of his questions, which would raise one of them out of an existence as a shadow and place him in the real world. Whether asleep or awake, the man pondered the answers of his phantoms and, not letting himself be misled by imposters, divined in certain of their quandaries a growing intelligence. He was in search of a soul worthy of taking a place in the world.

After nine or ten nights he realized, feeling bitter over it, that nothing could be expected from those pupils who passively accepted his teaching but that he might, however, hold hopes for those who from time to time hazarded reasonable doubts about what he taught. The former, although they deserved love and affection, could never become real; the latter, in their dim way, were already real. One evening (now his evenings were also given over to sleeping, now he was only awake for an hour or two at dawn) he dismissed his vast dream-school forever and kept a single disciple. He was a quiet, sallow, and at times rebellious young man with sharp features akin to those of his dreamer. The sudden disappearance of his fellow pupils did not disturb him for very long, and his progress, at the end of a few private lessons, amazed his teacher. Nonetheless, a catastrophe intervened. One morning, the man emerged from his sleep as from a sticky wasteland, glanced up at the faint evening light, which at first he confused with the dawn, and realized that he had not been dreaming. All that night and the next day, the hideous lucidity of insomnia weighed down on him. To tire himself out he tried to explore the surrounding forest, but all he managed, there in a

thicket of hemlocks, were some snatches of broken sleep, fleetingly tinged with visions of a crude and worthless nature. He tried to reassemble his school, and barely had he uttered a few brief words of counsel when the whole class went awry and vanished. In his almost endless wakefulness, tears of anger stung his old eyes.

He realized that, though he may penetrate all the riddles of the higher and lower orders, the task of shaping the senseless and dizzying stuff of dreams is the hardest that a man can attempt—much harder than weaving a rope of sand or of coining the faceless wind. He realized that an initial failure was to be expected. He then swore he would forget the populous vision which in the beginning had led him astray, and he sought another method. Before attempting it, he spent a month rebuilding the strength his fever had consumed. He gave up all thoughts of dreaming and almost at once managed to sleep a reasonable part of the day. The few times he dreamed during this period he did not dwell on his dreams. Before taking up his task again, he waited until the moon was a perfect circle. Then, in the evening, he cleansed himself in the waters of the river, worshipped the gods of the planets, uttered the prescribed syllables of an all-powerful name, and slept. Almost at once, he had a dream of a beating heart.

He dreamed it throbbing, warm, secret. It was the size of a closed fist, a darkish red in the dimness of a human body still without a face or sex. With anxious love he dreamed it for fourteen lucid nights. Each night he perceived it more clearly. He did not touch it, but limited himself to witnessing it, to observing it, to correcting it now and then with a look. He felt it, he lived it from different distances and from many angles. On the fourteenth night he touched the pulmonary artery with a finger and then the whole heart, inside and out. The examination satisfied him. For one night he deliberately did not dream; after that he went back to the heart again, invoked the name of a planet, and set out to envision another of the principal organs. Before a year was over he came to the skeleton, the eyelids. The countless strands of hair were perhaps the hardest task of all. He dreamed a whole man, a young man, but the young man could not stand up or speak, nor could he open his eyes. Night after night, the man dreamed him asleep.

In the cosmogonies of the Gnostics, the demiurges mould a red Adam who is unable to stand on his feet; as clumsy and crude and elementary as that Adam of dust was the Adam of dreams wrought by the nights of the magician. One evening the man was

at the point of destroying all his handiwork (it would have been better for him had he done so), but in the end he restrained himself. Having exhausted his prayers to the gods of the earth and river, he threw himself down at the feet of the stone image that may have been a tiger or a stallion, and asked for its blind aid. That same evening he dreamed of the image. He dreamed it alive, quivering; it was no unnatural cross between tiger and stallion but at one and the same time both these violent creatures and also a bull, a rose, a thunderstorm. This manifold god revealed to him that its earthly name was Fire, that there in the circular temple (and in others like it) sacrifices had once been made to it, that it had been worshipped, and that through its magic the phantom of the man's dreams would be awakened to life in such a way that—except for Fire itself and the dreamer—every being in the world would accept him as a man of flesh and blood. The god ordered that, once instructed in the rites, the disciple should be sent downstream to the other ruined temple, whose pyramids still survived, so that in that abandoned place some human voice might exalt him. In the dreamer's dream, the dreamed one awoke.

The magician carried out these orders. He devoted a period of time (which finally spanned two years) to initiating his disciple into the riddles of the universe and the worship of Fire. Deep inside, it pained him to say goodbye to his creature. Under the pretext of teaching him more fully, each day he drew out the hours set aside for sleep. Also, he reshaped the somewhat faulty right shoulder. From time to time, he was troubled by the feeling that all this had already happened, but for the most part his days were happy. On closing his eyes he would think, 'Now I will be with my son.' Or, less frequently, 'The son I have begotten awaits me and he will not exist if I do not go to him.'

Little by little, he was training the young man for reality. On one occasion he commanded him to set up a flag on a distant peak. The next day, there on the peak, a fiery pennant shone. He tried other, similar exercises, each bolder than the one before. He realized with a certain bitterness that his son was ready—and perhaps impatient—to be born. That night he kissed him for the first time and sent him down the river to the other temple, whose whitened ruins were still to be glimpsed over miles and miles of impenetrable forest and swamp. At the very end (so that the boy would never know he was a phantom, so that he would think himself a man like all men), the magician imbued with total oblivion his disciple's long years of apprenticeship.

His triumph and his peace were blemished by a touch of weariness. In the morning and evening dusk, he prostrated him-

self before the stone idol, perhaps imagining that his unreal son was performing the same rites farther down the river in other circular ruins. At night he no longer dreamed; or else he dreamed the way all men dream. He now perceived with a certain vagueness the sounds and shapes of the world, for his absent son was taking nourishment from the magician's decreasing consciousness. His life's purpose was fulfilled; the man lived on in a kind of ecstasy. After a length of time that certain tellers of the story count in years and others in half-decades, he was awakened one midnight by two rowers. He could not see their faces, but they spoke to him about a magic man in a temple up north who walked on fire without being burned. The magician suddenly remembered the god's words. He remembered that of all the creatures of the world, Fire was the only one who knew his son was a phantom. This recollection, comforting at first, ended by tormenting him. He feared that his son might wonder at this strange privilege and in some way discover his condition as a mere appearance. Not to be a man but to be the projection of another man's dreams—what an unparalleled humiliation, how bewildering! Every father cares for the child he has begotten—he has allowed—in some moment of confusion or happiness. It is understandable, then, that the magician should fear for the future of a son thought out organ by organ and feature by feature over the course of a thousand and one secret nights.

The end of these anxieties came suddenly, but certain signs foretold it. First (after a long drought), a far-off cloud on a hilltop, as light as a bird; next, toward the south, the sky, which took on the rosy hue of a leopard's gums; then, the pillars of smoke that turned the metal of the nights to rust; finally, the headlong panic of the forest animals. For what had happened many centuries ago was happening again. The ruins of the fire god's shrine were destroyed by fire. In a birdless dawn the magician saw the circling sheets of flame closing in on him. For a moment, he thought of taking refuge in the river, but then he realized that death was coming to crown his years, and to release him from his labours. He walked into the leaping pennants of flame. They did not bite into his flesh, but caressed him and flooded him without heat or burning. In relief, in humiliation, in terror, he understood that he, too, was an appearance, that someone else was dreaming him.

THE ZOMBIE WITNESS

'Despite accounts of a more liberal climate on the island of Haiti since the death of dictator, "Papa Doc" Duvalier, the grip of voodoo on the population remains unchanged.

This has been helped, no doubt, by the persistent rumours that "Papa Doc" is not really dead, but will be returning one day to aid his son who now rules the Caribbean island.

To prevent any attempts by fanatical followers to dig up the remains of the former dictator, a twenty-four hour watch is kept on his grave by the military.

Zombies, the living dead, are said to still roam the inland plantations, and according to Haitian refugees who have fled the dictatorship, the old voodoo rituals are still widely practised.

The latest example of the strength of this belief has come from Port-au-Prince where a man on a murder charge has been granted an adjournment in his trial until August 1. He has requested time to resurrect his victim and call him as a defence witness.'

*Miami Herald,
June 1973*

The Wedding Guests

W. B. SEABROOK

An elderly and respected Haitian gentleman whose wife was French had a young niece, by name Camille, a fair-skinned octo-roon girl whom they introduced and sponsored in Port-au-Prince society, where she became popular, and for whom they hoped to arrange a brilliant marriage.

Her own family, however, was poor; her uncle, it was understood, could scarcely be expected to dower her—he was prosperous, but not wealthy, and had a family of his own—and the French *dot* system prevails in Haiti, so that while the young beaux of the élite crowded to fill her dance-cards, it became gradually evident that none of them had serious intentions.

When she was nearing the age of twenty, Matthieu Toussel, a rich coffee-grower from Morne Hôpital, became a suitor, and presently asked her hand in marriage. He was dark and more than twice her age, but rich, suave, and well educated. The principal house of the Toussel habitation, on the mountainside almost overlooking Port-au-Prince, was not thatched, mud-walled, but a fine wooden bungalow, slate-roofed, with wide verandahs, set in a garden among gay poinsettias, palms and Bougainvillæa vines. He had built a road there, kept his own big motor-car, and was often seen in the fashionable cafés and clubs.

There was an old rumour that he was affiliated in some way with voodoo or sorcery, but such rumours are current concerning almost every Haitian who has acquired power in the mountains, and in the case of men like Toussel are seldom taken seriously. He asked no *dot*, he promised to be generous, both to her and her straitened family, and the family persuaded her into the marriage.

The black planter took his pale girl-bride back with him to the mountain, and for almost a year, it appears, she was not unhappy, or at least gave no signs of it. They still came down to Port-au-

Prince, appeared occasionally at the club *soirées*. Toussel permitted her to visit her family whenever she liked, lent her father money, and arranged to send her young brother to a school in France.

But gradually her family, and her friends as well, began to suspect that all was not going so happily up yonder as it seemed. They began to notice that she was nervous in her husband's presence, that she seemed to have acquired a vague, growing dread of him. They wondered if Toussel were ill-treating or neglecting her. The mother sought to gain her daughter's confidence, and the girl gradually opened her heart. No, her husband had never ill-treated her, never a harsh word; he was always kindly and considerate, but there were nights when he seemed strangely pre-occupied, and on such nights he would saddle his horse and ride away into the hills, sometimes not returning until after dawn, when he seemed even stranger and more lost in his own thoughts than on the night before. And there was something in the way he sometimes sat staring at her which made her feel that she was in some way connected with those secret thoughts. She was afraid of his thoughts and afraid of him. She knew intuitively, as women know, that no other woman was involved in these nocturnal excursions. She was not jealous. She was in the grip of an unreasoning fear. One morning when she thought he had been away all night in the hills, chancing to look out of a window, so she told her mother, she had seen him emerging from the door of a low frame building in their own big garden, set at some distance from the others and which he had told her was his office where he kept his accounts, his business papers, and the door always locked. . . . 'So, therefore,' said the mother, relieved and reassured, 'what does this all amount to? Business troubles, those secret thoughts of his, probably . . . some coffee combination he is planning and which is perhaps going wrong, so that he sits up all night at his desk figuring and devising, or rides off to sit up half the night consulting with others. Men are like that. It explains itself. The rest of it is nothing but your nervous imagining.'

And this was the last rational talk the mother and daughter ever had. What subsequently occurred up there on the fatal night of the first wedding anniversary they pieced together from the half-lucid intervals of a terrorized, cowering, hysterical creature, who finally went stark, raving mad. But what she had gone through was indelibly stamped on her brain; there were early periods when she seemed quite sane, and the sequential tragedy was gradually evolved.

On the evening of their anniversary Toussel had ridden away, telling her not to sit up for him, and she had assumed that in his

preoccupation he had forgotten the date, which hurt her and made her silent. She went away to bed early, and finally fell asleep.

Near midnight she was awakened by her husband, who stood by the bedside, holding a lamp. He must have been some time returned, for he was fully dressed now in formal evening clothes.

'Put on your wedding dress and make yourself beautiful,' he said; 'we are going to a party.' She was sleepy and dazed, but innocently pleased, imagining that a belated recollection of the date had caused him to plan a surprise for her. She supposed he was taking her to a late supper-dance down at the club by the seaside, where people often appeared long after midnight. 'Take your time,' he said, 'and make yourself as beautiful as you can—there is no hurry.'

An hour later when she joined him on the verandah, she said, 'But where is the car?'

'No,' he replied, 'the party is to take place here,' and she noticed that there were lights in the outbuilding, the 'office' across the garden. He gave her no time to question or protest. He seized her arm, led her through the dark garden, and opened the door. The office, if it had ever been one, was transformed into a dining-room, softly lighted with tall candles. There was a big old-fashioned buffet with a mirror and cut-glass bowls, plates of cold meats and salads, bottles of wine and decanters of rum.

In the centre of the room was an elegantly-set table with damask cloth, flowers, glittering silver. Four men, also in evening clothes, but badly fitting, were already seated at this table. There were two vacant chairs at its head and foot. The seated men did not rise when the girl in her bride-clothes entered on her husband's arm. They sat slumped down in their chairs and did not even turn their heads to greet her. There were wine-glasses partly filled before them, and she thought they were already drunk.

As she sat down mechanically in the chair to which Toussel led her, seating himself facing her, with the four guests ranged between them, two on either side, he said, in an unnatural strained way, the stress increasing as he spoke:

'I beg you . . . to forgive my guests their . . . seeming rudeness. It has been a long time . . . since . . . they have . . . tasted wine . . . sat like this at table . . . with . . . with so fair a hostess. . . . But, ah, presently . . . they will drink with you, yes . . . lift . . . their arms, as and . . . dance with you . . . more . . . they will . . .'

Near her, the black fingers of one silent guest were clutched rigidly around the fragile stem of a wine-glass, tilted, spilling. The horror pent up in her overflowed. She seized a candle, thrust it close to the slumped, bowed face, and saw the man was dead.

She was sitting at a banquet table with four propped-up corpses.

Breathless for an instant, then screaming, she leaped to her feet and ran. Toussel reached the door too late to seize her. He was heavy and more than twice her age. She ran still screaming across the dark garden, flashing white among the trees, out through the gate. Youth and utter terror lent wings to her feet, and she escaped. . . .

A procession of early market-women, with their laden baskets and donkeys, winding down the mountainside at dawn, found her lying unconscious far below, at the point where the jungle trail emerged into the road. Her filmy dress was ripped and torn, her little white satin bride-slippers were scuffed and stained, one of the high heels ripped off where she had caught it in a vine and fallen.

They bathed her face to revive her, bundled her on a pack-donkey, walking beside her, holding her. She was only half-conscious, incoherent, and they began disputing among themselves as peasants do. Some thought she was a French lady who had been thrown or fallen from a motor-car; others thought she was a *Dominicaine*, which has been synonymous in creole from earliest colonial days with 'fancy prostitute.' None recognized her as Madame Toussel; perhaps none of them had ever seen her. They were discussing and disputing whether to leave her at a hospital of Catholic sisters on the outskirts of the city, which they were approaching, or whether it would be safer—for them—to take her directly to police headquarters and tell their story. Their loud disputing seemed to rouse her; she seemed partially to recover her senses and understand what they were saying. She told them her name, her maiden family name, and begged them to take her to her father's house.

There, put to bed and with doctors summoned, the family were able to gather from the girl's hysterical utterances a partial comprehension of what had happened. They sent up that same day to confront Toussel if they could—to search his habitation. But Toussel was gone, and all the servants were gone except one old man, who said that Toussel was in Santo Domingo. They broke into the so-called office, and found there the table still set for six people, wine spilled on the table-cloth, a bottle overturned, chairs knocked over, the platters of food still untouched on the side-board, but beyond that they found nothing.

Toussel never returned to Haiti. It is said that he is living now in Cuba. Criminal pursuit was useless. What reasonable hope could they have had of convicting him on the unsupported evidence of a wife of unsound mind?

And there, as it was related to me, the story trailed off to a shrugging of the shoulders, to mysterious inconclusion.

What had this Toussel been planning—what sinister, perhaps criminal necromancy in which his bride was to be the victim or the instrument? What would have happened if she had not escaped?

I asked these questions, but got no convincing explanation or even theory in reply. There are tales of rather ghastly abominations, unprintable, practised by certain sorcerers who claim to raise the dead, but so far as I know they are only tales. And as for what actually did happen that night, credibility depends on the evidence of a demented girl.

So what is left?

What is left may be stated in a single sentence:

Matthieu Toussel arranged a wedding anniversary supper for his bride at which six plates were laid, and when she looked into the faces of his four other guests, she went mad.

THE MEXICAN CURANDERO

'Today the age-old practice of the curandero flourishes as never before in Mexican history, especially in border cities and towns where witches and wizards are being patronized more and more by Americans.'

Every day "tourists" from the United States cross the border at entry stations all the way from Brownsville, Texas, to Mexicali, California, to bring their problems and their troubles to the curanderos. Love affairs, financial matters and family involvements appear to predominate.

Other reasons include help in finding a lost person, the hope of curing a chronic, perhaps fatal, disease, and concern about the future. Among American patrons, the revenge motive ranks lowest.

Some curanderos are shrewd charlatans, skilled in preying upon the superstitious. Some are genuine witches who appear to be endowed with unexplainable if not supernatural powers.'

Time,
February 1970



The Power of Every Root

AVRAM DAVIDSON

Carlos Rodriguez Nunez, a police officer of the municipality of Santo Tomas, sat in the private waiting-room of Dr. Olivera considering his situation. Perhaps he ought not to be there at all.

Not the private waiting-room in particular: it was usually empty except during the week following major fiestas, when it was likely to be much occupied by the younger sons of prosperous families who had (the younger sons) visited the Federal Capital, touring the libraries and theatres and museums and other buildings of the national patrimony . . . but never, never *las casitas*. The reason, therefore, why they were here?

'A strain, Sir Doctor. Without doubt, nothing more than a strain . . . ! Woe of me, Sir Doctor! What an enormous needle! Surely—just for a tiny, little strain?'

The physician would smile benignly, speak soothingly, continue charging his syringe with penicillin.

None of this was applicable to the police officer Carlos. In fact, it was not applicable to the younger sons of the *non-prosperous* families, who—for one thing—could only afford to visit the District Capital (or, at most, the State one) on fiestas; and—for another—did not take their subsequent difficulties to a physician: they took them to the *curandero*. Carlos now wondered if he should not do the same. No . . . No . . . The social status of a government employee, a civil servant, might be imperilled by visiting a native herbalist and wizard. Besides, the physician's public waiting-room was just that: public. Let him be seen there, word would get around, Don Juan Antonio would ask questions. Don Juan Antonio was *jefe de policia*, and it seemed to Carlos that his superior's manner to him of late had lacked cordiality. But, then, it seemed to Carlos that everybody's attitude towards him of late lacked cordiality. He could not understand why this should be.

He was a very gentle policeman; he took only the customary little bites of graft; he did not hit drunks hard; he gave cigarettes to prisoners. Often.

Why, therefore, people should—suddenly, sometimes only for matters of few seconds—change, become hideous, diabolical, when they looked at him, he could not know. Their faces would swell, become even more horrible than those of the masked *moros* or the judases in the fiesta parades had seemed to him as a child. The air would become hot; voices would croak and mutter ugly things; he had difficulty breathing, sometimes. And his head—

A large, tinted oval photograph of old Doña Caridad, Dr. Olivera's mother, glared at him from the wall. Her lips writhed. She scowled. Carlos got up hastily. Doña Caridad's unexpected and totally unprovoked hostility was more than he could stand. He had his hand out to open the outer door when the inner door opened and the physician himself stood there—momentarily surprised, immediately afterwards urbane as always. Bowing him in, Doña Caridad was as immovable and expressionless as before.

There was a formal exchange of courtesies. Then silence. Dr. Olivera gestured toward a publication on his desk. 'I have just been reading,' he said, 'in the medical journal. About eggs. Modern science has discovered so much about eggs.' Carlos nodded. Dr. Olivera placed his fingertips together. He sighed. Then he got up and, with a sympathetic expression, gestured for Carlos to drop his trousers.

'Ah, no, Sir Medico,' the officer said hastily. 'No, no, it isn't anything like that.' Dr. Olivera's mouth sagged. He seemed to hesitate between annoyance and confusion. Carlos breathed in, noisily, then said, all in a rush, 'My head is bursting. I have dizziness and pains, my eyes swell, my chest burns, my heart also, and—and—' He paused. He couldn't tell about the way people's faces changed. Or about, just now, for example, Doña Caridad. Dr. Olivera might not be trusted to keep confidence. Carlos choked and tried to swallow.

The physician's expression had grown increasingly reassured and confident. He pursed his lips and nodded. 'Does the stomach work?' he inquired. 'Frequently? Sufficiently frequently?'

Carlos wanted to tell him that it did, but his throat still was not in order, and all that came out was an uncertain croak. By the time he succeeded in swallowing, the *señor medico* was speaking again.

'Ninety per cent of the infirmities of the corpus,' he said, making serious, impressive sounds with his nose, 'are due to the stomach's functioning with insufficient frequency. Thus the corpus and its

system become poisoned, Sir Police Official—poisoned! We inquire as to the results—We find—' he shook his head rapidly from side to side and threw up his hands '—that pains are encountered. They are encountered not only in the stomach, but in,' he enumerated on his fingers, 'the head. The chest. The eyes. The liver and kidneys. The urological system. The upper back. The lower back. The legs. The entire corpus, sir, becomes debilitated.' He lowered his voice, leaned forward, half-whispered, half-hissed, '*One lacks capacity...*' He closed his eyes, compressed his lips, and leaned back, fluttering his nostrils and giving short little up-and-down nods of his head. His eyes flew open, and he raised his brows. '*Eho?*'

Carlos said, 'Doctor, I am thirty years old, I have always until now been in perfect health, able, for example, to lift a railroad tie. My wife is very content. Whenever I ask her, she says, *Como no?* And afterwards she says, *Ay, bueno!* I do not lack—' A baby cried in the public waiting-room. Dr Olivera got up and took out his pen.

'I will give you a prescription for an excellent medication,' he said, making a fine flourish and heading the paper with a large, ornate, *Sr. C. Rodriguez N.* He wrote several lines, signed it, blotted it, handed it over. 'One before each alimentation for four days, or until the stomach begins to function frequently . . . Do you wish the medicine from me, or from the *farmacia?*'

Discouraged, but still polite, Carlos said, 'From you, Doctor. And . . . Your honorarium?'

Dr. Olivera said, deprecatingly, 'With the medication . . . ten pesos. For you, as a civil servant. Thank you . . . ah! And also: avoid eggs. Eggs are difficult to digest—they have very, very large molecules.'

Carlos left via the private waiting-room. Doña Caridad looked away, contemptuously. Outside, those coarse fellows, woodcutters, the cousins Eugenio and Onofrio Cruz, nudged one another, sneered. Carlos looked away.

He crossed the plaza, vaguely aware of its smells of grilling, crisp pork *carnitas*, ripe fruit, wood smoke. His head and eyes and throat were misbehaving again. He remembered that the *Forestal* authorities had forbidden woodcutting for a month as a conservation measure and that he had meant to look out for possible violations. A toothless old Indian woman with bare, grey feet, padded by, munching a piece of fried fish. Her face twisted, became huge, hideous. He shut his eyes, stumbled. After a moment he felt better and went on up the steps of the covered market and into the *excusado*. As always he received mild pleasure from not having to pay the twenty centavos charge. He closed

the door of the booth, dropped the pills in the bowl, flushed it. So. Saved twenty centavos, spent—wasted—ten pesos. On the wall was a new crop of graffiti. *A harlot is the mother of Carlos Rodriguez N.* read one. Ordinarily he would have read it without malice, even admiring the neat moderation of the insult—by crediting him with two family names, albeit reducing one to the formal initial, the writer had avoided accusing him of illegitimacy. Or he might have remarked to himself the effects of enforcing the lowered compulsory school entrance age: the obscenities were increasingly being written lower and lower on the walls.

But now—now—

Incoherent with rage, he rushed, shouting, outside. And almost ran into his superior, Don Juan Antonio, the chief of police. Who looked at him with the peculiar look so familiar nowadays, asked, 'Why are you shouting?' And sniffed his breath.

Accepting this additional insult, Carlos muttered something about boys begging in the market. Don Juan Antonio brushed this aside, gestured towards the other end of the plaza. 'Twenty autobuses of students from the high schools and colleges of the State Capital are stopping over here before they continue on the National Youth Convention. Must I direct traffic myself while you are chasing beggar boys?'

'Ah, no, *señor jefe!*' Carlos walked hastily to where the yellow buses were slowly filing into the plaza and began directing them to the somewhat restricted place available for parking—the rest of the space being already occupied by vendors of black pottery marked with crude fish, brown pottery painted with the most popular women's names, parrot chicks, Tabasco bananas, brightly coloured cane-bottom chairs, pineapples sliced open to reveal the sweet contents, shoes, rubber-tyre-soled sandals, holy pictures and candles, *rebozos*, *mantillas*, pear-shaped lumps of farm butter, grilled strips of beef, a hundred varieties of beans, a thousand varieties of chili peppers, work shirts, bright skirts, plastic tablecloths, patriotic pictures, knitted caps, *sombreros*: the infinite variety of the Latin American marketplace—he called out to the bus driver, banging his hand on the bus to indicate that the vehicle should come back a little bit more . . . a little bit more . . . a little bit—

Crash!

He had backed the bus right into the new automobile belonging to Don Pacifico, the *presidente municipal!* The driver jumped out and cursed; the mayor jumped out and shouted; the students descended; the population assembled; the police chief came running and bellowing; Señorita Filomena—the mayor's aged and virginal aunt—screamed and pressed her withered

hands to her withered chest; her numerous great-nephews and great-nieces began to cry—Carlos mumbled, made awkward gestures, and that ox, the stationmaster, a man who notoriously lacked education, and was given to loud public criticism of the police: he laughed.

The crowd became a mob, a hostile mob, the people of which continuously split in two in order to frighten and confuse the miserable police officer with their double shapes and now dreadful faces. It was horrible.

Lupe's body, one was always aware, was altogether independent of Lupe's dress. It did not depend upon it for support, nor did it quarrel or struggle to escape from it, but, firm and smooth and pleasant, it announced both its presence and its autonomy and, like the dress itself, was always bright and clean and sweet. Others might doubt the fidelity of a comely wife, but not Carlos.

Lupe was the best thing about the *ranchito* Rodriguez, but there were other good things about it—everything, in fact, about it was good. The large brown adobe bricks of the walls were well-made, well-cured, well-set in their places; the tiles of the roof neither cracked nor leaked nor slipped. *Pajaritos* hopped about from perch to perch in their wooden cages, chirping and singing, outdone in their bright colours only by the dozens of flowering plants set in little pots or cans. Carlos and Lupe never had to buy corn to make *nixtamal*, the dough for tortillas or tamales; they grew their own, and this supplied them as well with husks to wrap and boil the tamales in, and when the cobs had dried they made good fuel. There was an apple tree and a great tall old piñole which supplied them with blue-grey nuts whose kernels were as sweet as the apples. The goat had always fodder enough, the pig was fine and fat, and half a dozen hens relieved them of any need to depend upon the chancy eggs of the market women. Not the least of the *ranchito's* many amenities was its stand of fleshy maguey cactus whose nectar gave an *aguamiel* from which, mixed with the older and stronger *madre de pulque*, came the delicious and finished milk-coloured drink which made it unnecessary for either Carlos or Lupe to patronize the bare and shabby, sour-smelling fly-ridden pulquerias. . . .

True, there were no children, but they had only been married two years. It was Carlos's experienced observation that it sometimes took longer than that before children started arriving, and that once they did start, they generally continued in sufficient quantity.

The *ranchito* was good; it was very, very good—but there was

all the difference in the world between being a civil servant with a country place and being a peasant. Lupe's figure, with its small but lovely curves, would become stooped and stringy and prematurely old. Carlos would wear the patched, baggy cottons of the *campesino* instead of his neat gabardines. That is, if he merely lost his job. What costume they wore, those unfortunates in the Misericordia, the great walled hospital for the mentally infirm, he did not know.

This institution, long since secularized, had been originally of religious foundation, and Carlos, remembering that, considered the possibility of discussing his problem with the local priest. He did not consider it long. True, Carlos was a believer, and wore no less than two medals on a golden chain against his strong chest. He never went to church: also true. For one thing, it was not very male to go to church. That was for women. And old men. For another, it was regarded that servants of the secular state should neither persecute nor patronize religious functions. Also, the priest, that amiable and gregarious man, might accidentally let slip a wrong word in a wrong ear. Of course it was not to be thought for a moment that he would betray the seal of the confessional. But this—this horror of Carlos's days of late—this was no matter to confess. It was not a sin, it was a misfortune. He could seek the *cura's* friendly counsel no more. That worthy man mingled much with the *caciques*, those of political importance. A single sympathetic reference to 'poor Carlos,' and 'poor Carlos' might find himself displaced in office by a *cacique's* nephew, cousin, brother-in-law—the precise degree of relationship hardly mattered.

Not with Don Juan Antonio's warning words still in his ears.

'One more mistake, young one! Just one more—!'

Carlos blinked. He hadn't realized he'd come so far from town. Behind and to his left was the Holy Mountain, the high hill on which had stood the pyramid in pagan times, from which now sounded the discordant bells of the little church. Behind and to his right was the concrete circle of the bullring. Ahead, the footpath he had for some reason been following broke into a fork. The one to the right led to the little house of his maternal aunt Maria Pilar, a woman of strong personality, who inclined to take advantage of his infrequent visits by asking him to mend her roof or say the rosary or perhaps both. He did not desire to see Tia Maria Pilar. Certainly not now. Why, then, was he here?

The path to the left, where did it lead? Eventually to the tiny hamlet of San Juan Bautista. Before that? It paralleled the railroad tracks a long while. It provided access to a well. A small river frequented by washerwomen and occasional gringo artists.

Various tracts of woodland. Cornfields. And the isolated house of Ysidro Chache, the *curandero*.

Carlos took off his cap and wiped his forehead. Cautiously, he looked from side to side. Casually, very casually. Far, far off, a tiny figure toiled across the fields leading a laden burro. It was entirely possible that the burro carried a combustible—charcoal, made from illegally cut wood. Or, more simply, the wood itself. Those fellows were so bold! But it was too far away, and besides, that whole matter would wait for another time. What was immediately of concern was that no one, apparently, was observing him, Carlos.

He replaced his cap. Then, still casual—bold, in fact—he turned and took the path to the left.

Ysidro Chache was a wiry, ugly little man with one bad eye, the subject of occasional and uneasy low-toned talk. Could he see out of it, or not? Some held that he could, that, indeed, he could turn his eyes in different directions at once, like a mule. It was also remarked how popular, despite his ugliness, Ysidro Chache was among women. Not ugly ones alone, either. True, he was male. He was very male. In fact, a certain Mama Rosa, shameless, had been heard to say, 'Don Ysidro is a bull, and the other men are merely oxen! And he is generous, too . . .'

But the other men had a different explanation. 'It is his charms, his love-potions,' was the whispered consensus. Often, after such a conversation, more than one man, himself loudly and boastfully male in his *cantina* conversation, would sneak off to the lone small house in the countryside where the healer lived by himself with no steady company except a parrot reputed to be older than the Conquest and to speak all languages; as well as an odd-looking dog which could speak none. Someone, once, had been absurd enough to maintain that this dog came from a breed of barkless ones—but it was known that the man's father had been a foreigner (a Turk, or a Lutheran, or a gringo, or a Jew), and this had added to the absurdity of his contention.

It stood to obvious reason that Ysidro Chache's magic had deprived the dog of his bark in order to demonstrate how clearly he had no need of it to warn him. It was not even fierce! What ordinary person in the world would keep a dog for any other purposes? It was enough to make one shiver!

The path cut into the shoulder of a sloping hill and passed, slowly, by still sturdy though much overgrown stone walls, from the sunlight into the shadow. It was cool in the woods. Perhaps it was no more silent here, perhaps only suddenly it seemed so. Almost, he could wish for the thudding sound of an illicit axe and

its flat echo. But he heard none. Only the stealthy movement of something in the underbrush. Then, suddenly, he was at the house. The ancient parrot muttered something, the dog looked up, then down, indifferently. The police officer approached, slowly, announced himself without confidence. No one answered. From somewhere came the sound of a high, weak voice chanting or crooning. The parrot scowled, suddenly became two scowling parrots, but this lasted for only an eyeblink. Carlos was encouraged rather than otherwise... it did seem as though the potent influence of the *curandero* and his house was itself sufficient to diminish whatever was wrong with him. He announced himself again and pushed open the door.

The house was dim (naturally, properly) and smelled (not at all dimly) of wood smoke, herbs, rum, and a number of other things, including—recognized at once although for the first time—Ysidro Chache himself.

Who was squatting on the floor, singing his strange song, scattering his coloured seeds from a painted gourd onto the floor and examining the pattern in the single thin shaft of sunlight, then scooping up the seeds to cast them down again. Abruptly his song ceased. 'Abuelita Ana must die,' he said, matter-of-factly. His voice no longer high and weak, but deep and strong.

Carlos tensed. Was the *curandero* intending— Then he remembered who Abuelita Ana was, and relaxed. 'She has been dying for as long as I can remember her,' he said. Grandma Ana, with her twenty layers of garments, her tray of pills and salves and lotions and elixirs, palms and beads and holy pictures, her good luck charms and her patent medicines with the likenesses and signatures of grave and bearded Spanish doctors... and most of all, her long and thick and filthy yellow-grey and black finger-nails.

Ysidro Chache nodded. 'I have been keeping her alive,' he said. 'But I can't do it any longer. Perhaps today... Perhaps tomorrow...' He shrugged. 'Who knows?'

'And how are you, Sir Healer?'

'I? I am very well. The Lord and the saints love me.' He snickered.

Remembering that he was a policeman and that the good offices of a policeman were not despised, Carlos said, 'No one has been bothering you, I hope.'

The medicine man opened his good and bad eyes very wide. 'Bothering me? Who would dare?' he said, 'but someone has been bothering you.'

Carlos Rodriguez Nunez stared. He sighed, and his sigh broke

into a sob. With his voice not always under control, he told the healer of his troubles . . . the ugly voices heard, the ugly faces seen, the pains of body and head, dizziness, doubling of vision, unfriendliness, and enmity of people, and—finally—fear that he might lose his job.

Or worse.

The *curandero's* expression, as he listened and nodded was not totally dissimilar from that of Doctor Olivera. 'Pues . . . I don't think we have to deal here with the results of impiety,' he said slowly, with a reflective air. 'You're not a hunter or a woodcutter; you'd have little occasion to offend the Deer People or the Small People . . . even if you had, this is not the way in which they generally take revenge. I say, *generally*. But—for the moment—this is something we'll leave to one side.

'What then? The Evil Eye? One hears a lot of nonsense about it. As a matter of fact, grown men are very rarely the victims of the Evil Eye; it is the children whom one must look out for . . .'

He discussed various possibilities, including malfunctioning of the stomach, or its functioning with insufficient frequency, a difficulty for which he, Ysidro Chache, had many excellent herbs. 'But—' the policeman protested, 'it is not that. I assure you.'

Chache shrugged. 'What do you suspect, yourself, then?'

In a low, low voice, Carlos murmured, 'Witchcraft. Or, poison.'

Chache nodded, slowly, sadly. 'Eighty per cent of the infirmities of the corpus,' he admitted, 'proceed from one or the other of these two causes.'

'But who—? But why—?'

'Don't speak like an idiot!' the medicine man snapped. 'You are a police officer, you have a hundred thousand enemies, and each one has a hundred thousand reasons. *Why* is of little consequence; as for *who*, while it would be helpful if we knew and could lay a counter-curse, it is not essential. We do *not* know *who*, we only know *you*, and it is with *you* that we must concern ourselves.'

Humbly, Carlos muttered, 'I know. I know.'

He watched while Chache cast the seeds again, made him a *guardero* out of shells and stones and tufts of bright red wool, censed him with aromatic gum and fumed him with choking herbs, and performed the other rituals of the healer's arts, concluding his instructions with a warning to be exceedingly careful of what he ate and drank.

The officer threw up his head and hands in despair. 'A man with a thousand eyes could be taken off guard for long enough—If I turn my head in the cantina for a second, someone could drop a pinch of something into my food or drink—'

'Then eat only food of your wife's preparing, and as for drink, I will give you a little charm which will protect you for either rum or aguardiente.'

Vague about the amount of his *honorario*, Chache would say only that the cost of the first visit was twenty pesos, including the two charms. He directed that the next visit be in three days. Carlos walked away feeling partly reassured and partly re-afraid. The smell of the magic infumations was still in his nostrils, but, gradually, in the vanishing day, it was succeeded by others. A haze hung over everything. Despite official exhortations in the name of science and patriotism, the ignorant small farmers, and the people of the Indian *ejidos*, whose lands ringed around the municipality had begun the annual practice of burning their fields and thickets to prepare for the corn crop. It was perhaps not the best season, this one chosen by the *Forestal*, to have forbidden illicit wood cutting and burning; it would be difficult to distinguish one smoke from another at any distance—or, at night, one fire from another. It was a season when the land seemed to have reverted, in a way, to pagan times; there was fire all around, and always fire, and not infrequently some confused and terrified animal would find itself cut off, surrounded, and would burn to death. But these offences against, say, the Deer People, Carlos left to the offending Indios, and to the *curandero*.

Another and lighter haze hung over the town and its immediate environs. It was present twice daily, at early morning and at dusk: the haze of wood and charcoal fires which bore the faint but distinctive odour of tortillas, reminiscent of their faint but distinctive flavour, toasting on griddles. And the *pat-pat-pat* of the hands of the women making them.

Carlos had come to prefer the darkness. In it he could see no hostile, no distorted faces. Seeing fewer objects, he would be disturbed by fewer objects malevolently doubling themselves. If only at such times his irregular pains and distress would diminish as well... They seemed to, a little. But a little was not enough. Perhaps the things the *curandero* Ysidro Chache had done would diminish them much. Hastily, furtively, in a gathering darkness, Carlos fell to his knees and said a short, quick prayer to *La Guadalupeana*.

It was in his mind that his wife's full name was, after all, *María de Guadalupe*.

'*Tu cafe*,' she said, pouring it as soon as he entered; hot and strong and sweet. '*Tu quieres una torta?*'

He proceeded cautiously with his supper at first. But although his sense of taste was distorted, imparting a faintly odd flavour to the

food, it seemed that tonight his throat at least would give him no difficulty. Afterwards, as she finished washing the dishes, he approached and embraced her, one arm around her waist, one hand on her breast, and thoughtfully and gently took her ear between his teeth. She said, '*Cómo no?*' as usual.

But afterward she did not, as usual, say, '*Ay, bueno!*'

And afterward, also, in the bitterness of failure and the fatigue of despair, turning his thoughts to other things, he had his idea.

Surely, if he were to pull off a great coup—arrest someone besides a troublesome *borracho* for a change, for example—surely this would restore his so-greatly fallen credit with the police department, to wit, Don Juan Antonio. At least so he reasoned. He had the vague notion that the plan was not perfect, that, if he considered it carefully, he might find flaws in it. But he didn't wish to consider it that carefully; the effort was too great; there were too many voices muttering ugly things and distracting and bothering him, and besides, if he were to decide against the plan, he would have no reason for getting up. His pains were worse, and he knew he could not get back to sleep again. Therefore he should get up, and if he got up, there was nothing to do but leave the house.

And therefore he might as well try to carry out his plan.

He rose and dressed, buckled on his gun-belt, reassured himself of his flashlight, and went outside.

Dawn was yet not even a promise on the horizon. The stars were great white blazes in the black sky. He searched for Venus, hugest of all, remembering stories of how important she had been in the old religion, before the Conquest—but either she had not yet risen to be the morning star, or he was looking in the wrong place, or some tree or hill obscured her—

He did not need his flashlight yet, knowing the way hereabouts as well as he did his own house, or his own wife. He knew the very tree stump which, suddenly, unkindly . . . but, somehow, 'not unexpectedly . . . began to croak, '*Carlo' el loco. Carlo' el loco.* Soon you will be encountered in the Misericordia. *Ja ja! Loco Carlo!*'

The officer drew his gun, then thrust it back. A bullet was undoubtedly of no use. 'Wait,' he said. 'As soon as it is day and I have finished with my other duty, I will return and cut you up and pour *petroleo* on you and burn you up. Wait.'

The tree trunk fell silent at once and tried to hide itself in the blackness. But Carlo knew very well where it was, and passed on, giving many grim nods as he thought of it. He strained his ears but heard nothing of what he hoped he might. Doubtless the

malefactors had done their original work kilometres away, back in the wooded slopes of the mountains. Deer poachers worked the same territory, usually in pairs, one to hold the bright light to attract and fascinate the animal, and one to shoot it as it stood exposed. One man could carry half a deer easily enough. Such poachers needed neither roads nor paths either coming or going; it was useless to attempt to catch them.

Not so, however, with the woodcutters, those thieves of natural resources and national patrimony, denuding the forested hills and leaving them a prey to erosion! The more he thought of them, the more he realized the iniquity of their crimes. Moreover, look what great rogues they were even when in town— Consider how those cousins Eugenio and Onofrio Cruz (a choice pair!) had sneered and gibbered at him only the day before, in the plaza. In fact, on reflection, not only yesterday, either. And why? For no reason. So, clearly, Carlos's previous attitude had been wrong. Woodcutters were not mere poor devils toiling hard to earn their bread, and currently forbidden even to toil by *burócratas* intent on their own devious ends; merely to confront the axe-men and issue warnings was not enough. The darkness of the woods became overshot with red, scarlet and crimson. They needed to be taught one good lesson, once and for all. *Ladrones. Hijos de putas.*

But even two men could not carry on their backs enough wood from forest to town to make it worth the effort. A woodcutter required a horse, or a mule, or, at very least, a burro. Which confined him largely to paved or at any rate beaten thoroughfares. There were at least twenty such on this side of the town, but the nearer they approached to town the more they combined, so that, for the practical purposes of the moment, there were only five to be considered. The San Benito road led into the main highway too far south; daylight would find them in the open. The road of the old convent led past a checkpoint. A third was too long and winding; a fourth had in recent months become identical with one of the local creeks. Carlos was not very strong on arithmetic, but he felt fairly certain that this left but one road. To his surprise, he realized that he had, presumably while calculating, reached just that one. It now remained to consider exactly, or even approximately, where on that road might be the best place for his *emboscada*. Too close to the woods, the criminals might escape back into them. Too near the town, they might find refuge in house or patio. An ideal situation would be a place where the road was not only sunken but surrounded by walls on either side, not too near and not too far. Such a situation was not only ideal, it was actual, and it contained, moreover, a niche in which had

once reposed an image of La Guadalupeana before the Republic was secularized. Carlos snickered, thinking of the astonishment of the rogues as he sprang out upon them from that niche, pistol in hand!

He was still snickering when something seized hold of his foot and sent him sprawling.

The fall jarred his back and all his other bones. It sickened him, and all his quiescent pains flared up. Voices hooted and gibbered and mocked; faces made horns and spat at him. He lay there in the road, fighting for breath and for reason, sobbing. By and by he was able to breathe. The darkness was only darkness once again. He groped about, his fingers recoiled from what they found, then groped again and found the flashlight. He gave a long, high cry of anguish and of terror at what the yellow beam disclosed lying there in the road: the body of a man lying on its back in a pool of blood. It had shirt and pants and hands and feet, all as a man should.

But where a man's head should be, it had no head.

Slowly, slowly, the sky lightened. Mist mingled with the smoke and obscured the sun. Carlos Rodriguez N., with burning and smarting eyes, paced back and forth in the road. He had been doing so for an hour, two hours, three—who knows how long? He dared not sleep. Suppose someone were to steal the body? He had not dared to return to town and report the killing, for the same reason. He had been sustained in his vigil by the certain knowledge that daylight would bring people out on the road, and that he could send one of them into town with his message—preferably one of a group of mature and respectable *ciudadanos* whose testimony about the body would be incontrovertible. But as it happened, the first ones along the road were a pair of boys taking four cows out to pasture.

Or one boy taking two cows. It was no longer possible for Carlos to be sure if he were seeing single or double. One boy and two cows. Two boys and four cows. One body with no head. Two bodies with no heads. The sky was grey and cold and the treacherous sun feared to show itself. Eventually he was satisfied there were two boys, for one of them agreed to run back with the message and Carlos could see him running. At the same time he could see the other boy drive the cows off the road so as to get them past the body. Life or death, the cows must eat. The boys were out of sight, the cattle, too, and someone was shouting, still shouting, had been shouting forever. With a shock, he recognized his own voice, and fell silent.

Flies began to settle on the blood and on the body. Very soberly, very tiredly, Carlos observed the corpse. He did not recognize it. It looked neither familiar nor strange; it looked merely at rest, with no more problems. It didn't even seem so old any more—one had heard before of murderers removing the heads of their victims in order to destroy or at least delay identification. . . . Rest. And no problems. How long would it take the boy to get back to town?—and how long for Dona Juan Antonio to arrive? And then? And what then?—Would he commend Carlos? Curse him? Discharge him? Arrest him? Commit him?

The man's arms and legs began to tremble. He tried to repress the tremors, failed, seated himself on a stone, placed his back against the side of the roadside wall, placed his revolver in his lap, and without volition or premonition immediately fell asleep. His head jerked back and he jumped forward and upward with a cry of alarm, thrusting his hands forth to catch the revolver. He did not catch it, neither did he see it fall, neither could he find it. His shout and motion startled the flies and they rose from the drying blood with an ugly, thrumming buzz. Carlos pitched forward onto his hands and knees, stared stupidly at the dark pool with its blue lights. The blood was still there.

But the body was gone.

Everything whirled around and around, and Carlos whirled with it, staggering along the road with arms outstretched to keep from falling. He had slept, he had slept, after the hours of keeping awake to guard the body in the darkness, he had fallen sleep in the earliest daylight! Now he was worse off than ever, for now Don Juan Antonio knew there was a body—and how would Carlos be able to account for its loss? Weeping, sobbing, cursing, stumbling along, he knew that he could account for that no more than the loss of his revolver. He was certainly doomed.

Unless—Unless—he provided another body, so no one would know the difference.

Below him he saw the railroad tracks. Half-sliding, he descended the slope and ran along the rails. He knew who had, who *must* have done this to him! Who else but the woodcutters, those thieves and sons of harlots? Why else but to take revenge upon him for his intended capture?—and to prevent his ever doing so! But he would show them, now and forever. They had incited the entire *poblacion* against him, but he would show them. . . . He came to a switch and just a short distance away was the equipment shed of the maintenance crew, with its weathered inscription: *This Edifice And Its Entire Contents Is The Property Of The Republic*. With his shoulder skewed around he burst it open,

seized up the first grass-machete he saw, and rushed out again. Had he time?—Would he be in time? Would Don Juan Antonio have been awake? Been elsewhere? How soon would he start out? Carlos prayed for time to stand in between Don Juan Antonio and the barbarous plot of the woodcutters.

And luck was with him. The mists parted as he came back over the slope and there down below was a man leading a burro laden with wood. Cautiously and carefully, so shrewdly that he was obliged to smile to himself and to stifle his own laughter, Carlos approached bent over and on crouching knees. The burro approached, the burro passed, Carlos rose to his feet and darted forward on his toes. The machete swung. The body fell, spouting blood. Carlos kicked the fallen head like a football, watched it drop into the underbrush. He threw the body over his shoulder and ran and ran and ran.

'Carlos,' said Don Juan Antonio. 'Carlos! Do you hear me? Stop that! Stop that and listen to me! Do you hear—'

'No use, *jefe*,' said his assistant, Raimundo Cepeda. 'It's the shock—the shock. He won't come out of it for a while.'

Don Juan Antonio wiped his face with an impeccably ironed and cologne-scented handkerchief. 'Not he alone . . . I am also in such a situation. Dreadful. Horrible. People do not realize—'

'Poor young man,' sighed the elderly jailor, Uncle Hector, shaking his head. 'Only consider—'

Don Juan Antonio nodded vigorously. 'By all means let us consider. And let us consider the whole case. Thus I reconstruct it:

'We have that precious pair, the coarsely handsome cousins Eugenio and Onofrio Cruz. Ostensibly and even occasionally woodcutters. On the side—drunkards, when they had the money; thieves . . . and worse . . . when they had the chance. Partners against the rest of the world, fighting often between themselves. Last night they go out to cut wood, illegally. And on the way back a quarrel breaks out. Who knows why? For that matter, perhaps Eugenio merely decided on the spur of the moment to kill Onofrio. At any rate, he *does* kill him, with a blow of his axe. Then, to conceal the identity of the corpus, with the same axe he decapitates it. And returns to his hut, carrying the head. Also, the defunct's wallet.

'Once there, the thought occurs to him that he should not have left the body. With daylight coming, it will soon be found. So he prepares a pile or pyre of wood. With all the burning of fields and thickets, one more smoke will hardly be observed. Should anyone smell anything, they will assume it to be a trapped deer.

And he goes back to gain the body. But meanwhile the police have not been idle. Officer Carlos Rodriguez Nunez is not only up and around, but he has also located the corpus and is guarding it. Eugenio conceals himself. By and by the sun begins to rise, the little brothers Santa Anna approach, and Carlos sends one of them with a message to me. But the child is, after all, only a child; he doesn't go to the right place, wanders around, time is lost. Meanwhile Carlos, content that all will soon be well, sits down and falls asleep. Erroneously,' he added, with emphasis, 'but—understandably. Understandably.'

'Out from his place of concealment creeps the criminal murderer Eugenio Cruz. He steals both Carlos' service revolver *and* the corpus, loads it on the horse which he had brought with him and also concealed at a distance, returns to his hut. There he decides that he has not enough wood to incinerate the victim. So he conceals the corpus inside the hut and goes out for more wood. Meanwhile the unfortunate and valiant Carlos awakens, discovers his loss. By dint of the faculty of ratiocination so highly developed in our police, he deduces who the killer must be and where he must have gone. He tracks him down, securing, along the way, a machete. He confronts the arch-criminal. He kills him. Again, I must say: erroneously. And again I must say: understandably. Doubtless the murderer Cruz would have attempted to escape.

'At any rate, this second slaying is witnessed by the much respected citizen and veteran of the Revolution, Simon-Macabeo Lopez—'

The much respected citizen and veteran of the Revolution, Simon-Macabeo Lopez, snapped his sole remaining arm into a salute, and nodded solemnly.

'—who had risen early in order to go and cultivate the piece of land granted him by a grateful Republic. Veteran Lopez immediately and properly proceeds to inform me, arriving at the same time as the little brother Santa Anna. The police at once move to investigate, and we find—that which we found. A body here, a body there, here a head, and there a head, Carlos in a state of incoherent shock. So. Thus my reconstruction. What do you think of it?'

There was a silence. At length the assistant head of the police said, 'Masterful. Masterful.'

'Thank you.'

'It is such a reconstruction, so neat, so lucid, so full of clarity, as is usually to be met with only in the pages of criminal literature. But . . . *señor jefe* . . . it is not the truth. No, I must say, it is not the truth.'

Don Juan Antonio snapped, 'Why not?'

Cepeda sighed, gestured to the unfortunate Rodriguez. 'Because, *señor jefe*, you know and I know and almost everybody in town knows why. That bitch, that strumpet, Lupe de Rodriguez, was cuckolding poor Carlos with the cousins Eugenio and Onofrio Cruz, too. One man was not enough for her. And Carlos was blind to all.'

'Truth,' said the jailor, sighing.

'Truth,' said the veteran, nodding.

'Truth,' said the other policemen, shaking their heads, sadly.

Don Juan Antonio glared. Then his expression relaxed, and he lowered his head. 'It is the truth,' he said, at last. 'Ay, Carlos! Woe of me! Hombre! The husband is always the last to learn. For weeks, now, I have scarcely been able to look him in the face. Why, the very honour of the police was imperilled. How the railroad men were laughing at us. Mother!

'So, my poor Carlos— You finally found out, eh? *Nevertheless!*' Don Juan Antonio all but shouted at the others. 'It is my reconstruction which must stand, do you agree? Carlos has suffered enough, and moreover, there is the honour of the police.'

'Oh, agreed, agreed, *señor jefe*,' the other officers exclaimed, hastily and heartily.

'We may depend upon the discretion of the Veteran Lopez, I assume?'

The old man placed his hand over his heart and bowed. 'Securely,' he said. 'What Carlos did may have been, in some sense, technically illegal; I am no scholar, no lawyer. But it was natural. It was male.'

'It was male, it was very male,' the others all agreed.

Don Juan Antonio bent over, took the weeping Carlos by the shoulder, and tried to reassure him. But Carlos gave no sign of having heard, much less understood. He wept, he babbled, he struck out at things invisible, now and then he gave stifled little cries of alarm and fright and scuttled backwards across the floor. The chief and the others exchanged looks and comments of dismay. 'This commences to appear as more than temporary shock,' he said. 'If he continues like this, he may finally be encountered in the Misericordia, may God forbid. You, Gerardo,' he directed the youngest officer, 'go and solicit Dr. Olivera to appear as soon as convenient. He understands the techniques of modern science . . . Take no care, Carlos!' he said, encouragingly. 'We shall soon have you perfectly well . . . Now . . . There was something in my mind . . . Ah, Cepeda.'

'Yes, Sir Chief?'

'You said, "... with Eugenio and Onofrio Cruz, too." Too. Who else? Eh? What other man or men—I insist that you advise me of their names!'

Rather reluctantly, the assistant said, 'Well... sir... I know of only one other. Ysidro Chache. The *curandero*.'

Astounded, first, then outraged, then determined, Don Juan Antonio arose to his full height. 'The *curandero*, eh. That mountebank. That whore-monger. That charlatan.' He reached over and took up his cap. 'Come. We will pay a call upon this relic of the past. Let us inform him that the police have teeth. Eh?'

The jailor, old Hector, shook his head vigorously. The even older veteran of the Revolution put out his hand. 'No, no, *patron*,' he said, imploringly. 'Do not go. He is dangerous. He is very dangerous. He knows all the spirits and the demons of the woods. He can put a fearful curse upon you. No, no, no—'

'What!' cried Don Juan Antonio, scornfully. 'Do you think for a moment that I put stock in such superstition?' He stood brave and erect, not moving from his place.

Old Hector said, 'Ah, *patron*. It is not only that. I, after all, I too, am a civil servant. I do not—But, sir, consider. The *curandero* knows the power of every root and herb and leaf and grass. He is familiar with each mushroom and toadstool. Consider, consider—a single pinch in food or drink (and what man has a thousand eyes?)—Consider the result of such poison! Sterility, impotence, abortion, distortion of vision, paralysis of the throat, imaginary voices, dizziness, pain, swelling of the eyes, burning of the chest and heart, hallucinations, wasting away, insanity, and who knows what else? No, *patron*, no, no.'

'He traffics with the Devil,' old Lopez muttered, nodding.

'Hm, well,' said Don Juan Antonio. 'This commences to sound like a matter for the priest, then, would you say?'

'Securely, the priest! If not, indeed, the bishop!'

Instantly the chief of police returned his cap to its place. 'Obviously, then, it would be unfitting for a servant of the secular Republic to mix in such a matter. I thank you for calling this to my attention. We shall not dignify the old fraud with our presence.'

His eye at that moment was looking out the window. He seemed startled. 'Speaking of the—Heh-hem. Did I not mention the good priest? Look.' The good priest was indeed at that moment crossing the plaza, his technically illegal cassock covered by an unobjectionable overcoat for most of its length. Preceding him was his sacristan, bearing the small case in which, all knew were carried the vessels for the administering of the last sacrament.

'Hector—do me the favour, go and enquire, who has died?—and then go and see what is keeping the doctor. Ay, Carlos, hombre!'

Hector trotted out. A moment later he returned close enough to call a name before proceeding to the physician's office.

'What did he say?' Don Juan Antonio inquired. 'Who?'

'Sir, *Abuelita* Ana. You know, the—'

'What?' Don Juan Antonio was surprised. '*Grandmother* Ana? Who would have expected it? She has been dying as long as I can remember her. Well, well, well...' His mouth still astonished, he lifted his right hand and slowly crossed himself.

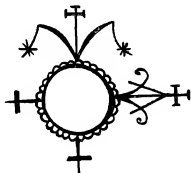
VOODOO IN AMERICA

'Police in Miami's Cuban community, where voodoo, black magic and ritual healing are practised, had a busy week-end investigating bizarre happenings.

In one of these, a 36-year-old Cuban, Juan Oliver Hernandez was found dying from bullet wounds after he told another Cuban that he intended to murder him and use his head for a voodoo sacrificial rite.

Police believe that the threatened man decided to "get" Hernandez first.'

*New York Times,
October 1973*



By Appointment Only

RICHARD MATHESON

At 11.14 that morning, Mr. Pangborn came into the barbershop. Wiley looked up from his *Racing Form*. 'Morning,' he said. He glanced at his wrist watch and smiled. 'You're right on time.'

Mr. Pangborn did not return the smile. He removed his suitcoat wearily and hung it on the rack. He trudged across the clean-swept-floor and sank down in the middle chair. Wiley put down his *Racing Form* and stood. He stretched and yawned. 'You don't look so hot. Mr. Pangborn,' he said.

'I don't feel so hot,' Mr. Pangborn replied.

'Sorry to hear that,' Wiley said. He cranked up the chair and locked it. 'Usual?' he asked.

Mr. Pangborn nodded. 'Okeydoke,' said Wiley. He pulled a clean cloth from its shelf and shook it out. 'Whatcha been doin' with yourself?' he asked.

Mr. Pangborn sighed. 'Not much.'

'Kind o' run down, are you?' Wiley asked, wrapping tissue around his customer's neck.

'That's the word,' said Mr. Pangborn. 'What've *you* been doing?'

'Not a hell of a lot,' Wiley answered. He pinned the cloth in place. 'Drove up to Vegas last week.' He made a rueful sound. 'Lost a pile.'

'Too bad,' said Mr. Pangborn.

'Oh, well.' Wiley grinned. 'Easy come, easy go.' He picked up the electric clipper and switched it on. 'Maria!' he called.

She made in inquiring noise in the back room.

'Mr. Pangborn's here.'

'Be right out,' she said.

Wiley started working on the back of Mr. Pangborn's neck. Mr. Pangborn closed his eyes. 'That's it,' Wiley told him. 'Take it easy.'

Mr. Pangborn shifted on the chair uncomfortably.

'You sure don't look so hot,' said Wiley.

Mr. Pangborn sighed again. 'I don't know,' he said. 'I just don't know.'

'What's the problem?' Wiley asked.

'The leg,' said Mr. Pangborn. 'The back. My right arm, off and on. My stomach.'

'Jesus,' Wiley said, concerned. 'You seen your doctor?'

'He doesn't know what it is,' Mr. Pangborn answered scornfully. 'I don't bother going to him anymore. All he ever does is send me to specialists.'

Wiley clucked. 'That's lousy, Mr. Pangborn.'

Mr. Pangborn exhaled. 'Dr. Rand's the only one who ever helps,' he said.

'He does?' Wiley looked delighted. 'Hey, I'm glad to hear that,' he said. 'I wasn't sure whether I should even mention him or not, him not being an MD and all. My brother swore up and down that he was something else, though.'

'He is,' said Mr. Pangborn. 'If it weren't for him. . . .'

'Hello, Mr. Pangborn,' said Maria.

Mr. Pangborn glanced aside and managed a smile. 'Maria,' he said.

'How are you today?' she asked.

'Getting by,' he said.

Maria set her manicuring table and chair beside the barber chair. As she sat down, her bust swelled out against the tightness of her sweater. 'You look tired,' she said.

Mr. Pangborn nodded. 'I am,' he said. 'I don't sleep too well.'

'That's a shame,' she sympathized. She began to work on his nails.

'Well, I'm glad this Rand is working out,' Wiley said. 'I'll have to try him myself sometime.'

'He's good,' said Mr. Pangborn. 'The only one who's given me relief.'

'Good deal,' said Wiley.

It was quiet for a while, as Wiley cut Mr. Pangborn's hair and Maria did his nails. Then Mr. Pangborn asked, 'Business slow today?'

'No,' said Wiley. 'I do it all by appointment now.' He smiled. 'It's the only way.'

When Mr. Pangborn had gone, Maria carried his hair and nail clippings into the back room. Unlocking the cupboard, she took out the doll labelled Pangborn. Wiley finished dialling the telephone and watched her as she replaced the doll's hair and nails with the fresh clippings. He smiled, remembering his reluctance

to hire her when she'd approached him, a year ago. He hadn't even been making enough money for himself at the time. How could he afford to hire a Haitian manicurist?

'Rand?' he said when the receiver was lifted at the other end of the line.

'Wiley. Pangborn was just in. When's he seeing you again?' He listened. 'OK,' he said, 'give him something for his back and we'll take that pin out for a couple of weeks. All right?' He listened. 'And, Rand,' he said, 'your cheque was late again this month. *Watch that.*'

At twenty minutes after one, Mr. Walters came into the shop. Removing his coat, he hung it on the rack and sat down in the middle chair. Wiley put down his *Racing Form* and stood. He made a clucking sound. 'Hey, you don't look so hot, Mr. Walters,' he said.

'I don't feel so hot,' Mr Walters replied.

WITCH MAGIC

'Witch cures, so often scorned by doctors, may become an important weapon in the National Health Service's fight against illness.

Hundreds of folk medicines and remedies are being collected by researchers at University College, London, for a team of doctors and scientists to analyze. Drug firms may eventually market some of them in modern form.

Mr. John Dodgson, assistant to Professor Albert H. Smith, who is controlling this investigation in twenty-three countries, says, "Quite a few of these remedies may be pure superstition, but doctors may find there is a great deal to be learned from some of the others."

*Daily Express,
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The Witch Doctor of Rosy Ridge

MACKINLAY KANTOR

The old-timers used to tell tales about Granny Blackshears and the boy she raised up, Thin Jimmy, and of the mighty tussle he had with a gang of Bobcats who came through the woods to do him harm. I reckon they would tell those same tales today; but now all the old-timers lie quiet amongst the moss.

And so I will speak a history which they might utter if they were flesh again. It is true as any tale can be, because I got it from my mother's own lips.

Before a man can fathom the ways of Thin Jimmy Blackshears and why he wore amulets around his neck, and carried his pockets full of charms, he must listen to another account sadder by far; and the waters at Lorn Widow Crossing still talk about it.

Because Granny Blackshears herself was the widow of the legend. Her husband it was whose team lost footing in a spring-time flood, and went twisting and fighting through the angry riffles until they were drowned, and their master along with them.

Yes, and more than that: for the Blackshearses' daughter was smothered in the currents at the same time, and the Blackshearses' daughter's husband too. But the elder woman held their baby safe in her arms, after her nearer relations were drowned.

Then, according to the story, Mrs. Virginia Blackshears made herself a camp nigh to the water's edge, and there she was abiding with her grandchild when people chanced to find her; and it was weeks before the soundness of her mind returned.

Some say the soundness never did return, and that only a smidgin of her wits resumed their proper place—which would account for the strange life she began to lead. But wiser folks declare that no great innocence clouded her memory; they say that beneath the hard lines of her little face and under the fresh-turned

graying of her hair, she was wiser and kinder than many a woman whose husband is alive and hearty and willing to eat the best she can bake, and to pet her or squabble with her as the spirit moves him.

That was in the earlier times, when Mr. Blackshears and his horses and relations were washed to their death. Indian trails still ran crooked through the woods, and the timber was thick and untrodden enough to hide miraculous things. There were cata-mounds still claiming this new country—or painters, as some folks described them—and bear marks still showed upon trees where the animals had scratched them. Fresh-arrived citizens would wake up sometimes to see Indians pacing past in the moonlight.

No matter how fierce and cruel the high, dark ridges seemed to other folks, poor Mrs. Blackshears declared that the thickets and the creatures prowling therein were the only friends she had left in this world. She had come from Kentucky, Mrs. Blackshears had, and her father was a reckless man who crossed over from Eastern States in the time of Daniel Boone. She was brought up to poverty and dangers of all kinds; she had a plumb courageous eye, and it would have taken more than a mouse to send her squealing.

Though poor, she swore that she was rich, and maybe that was the reason some people opined that her ways of thinking were addled beyond recall. She said that she owned every morsel of root and nut that grew in the timber—that snake-root and vervain and blood-root and mandrake all were hers. She believed that she had especial claim on every bluebird's wing, and that the feathers of the orioles were a kind of gilt that nobody else could purchase. She understood the activities of shooting stars and lightning blaze, and she was never known to be afraid of fox-fire.

And when thunder rattled and laughed beyond the western limits of Rosy Ridge, she said it spoke a language that few other mortals could interpret; and that some people's milk might be turned to sourness by the thunder's booming, but never hers.

Deprived of husband and daughter, desolate of household goods and skillet and spinning wheel and bed covers to wrap her in, she whispered that the riches of the woods were meant for her and her grand-boy, and she would take them. Her money would be a peculiar kind of yellow leaf which she dried and kept in a bag, and her fat would be the fat of pines, and rattlesnakes would leave her path when she walked abroad.

Oh, there were kind people even when they dwelt so far apart and when every cabin had a hog-pen finish. They tried to do the best they could by her. I reckon there were half a dozen families

in the region who would have taken the Blackshears woman to board and sleep and toil with them—to treat her like a maiden aunt, perhaps, and let her share their pone and hominy, and eat the meat their men brought home—since she had no man to fetch a haunch of venison to her.

But she was independent-minded. Maybe violent misfortunes had strengthened her independence and taught her to build little trust in human love, since it could easily be swept away when the waters rose.

Sole alone she dwelt, and she became a doctor to be summoned in time of need. Many were the horses' hoofs that cut the trail towards her door in the night-time. Granny Blackshear's fame went abroad, far over past Billingsgate and up into mountains that block the sky a day's journey to the south.

The panthers were killed and the brush thinned down somewhat, and the last Indians came bedraggled to the doors and begged for whisky. And the hair on Granny Blackshears turned yellow-white and stringy; and some said that she was a witch.

But no witch who ever rode upon a broomstick had such soothing ways with a baby that was puny. And some folks do recite that Granny Blackshears signed a compact with the Devil himself; but if that is true, the Devil taught her what to do when young mothers lay gasping for breath, or when strong men had flayed themselves with mishandled axes and the proud flesh started to grow. I reckon his name wasn't the Devil at all—not Him who taught her year by year the wondrous things she managed to do. For if her riches lived yonder among the pale clumps of liverwort, her God lived up those gullies too.

Her cabin was a lonely one, and I have heard that in early days she made her bed in a cave. But finally she managed a log house.

Granny Blackshears was no spring lamb when first she met her tragedy at Lorn Widow Crossing; she aged more rapidly than even a hard-working housewife of that time, and people called her Granny from the start. But she didn't mind. She was intent on raising her orphaned grandchild, and raise him she did.

The child grew wild as a ground-hog, and able to move faster on his feet. Jimmy was his name; by the time the boy had seen five summers he was called Thin Jimmy, because of the way the bones showed in his face.

It is told that she fed him on fox food and wolf food and coon food, but you can take a lick of salt along with that. Still, victuals were scarce in Granny's cabin during plenty of winters, and frosty air and a corn-shuck bed never put meat on anybody's bones, no matter how health-giving such a life may be.

Thin Jimmy was ungainly looking as he grew older, but he could climb a tree in a way to make any squirrel look sick. I reckon if he had had a tail, he could have hung by it, possum fashion, for he got his first training hanging onto Granny Blackshears' shoulders; and she had a kind of papoose arrangement to tie him in, when she went abroad on her doctoring business.

When he got old enough, Thin Jimmy kept house for Granny while she was gone, and other children believed that he entertained spooks and lizards and wildcats all together. To joke about Thin Jimmy—to make outrageous sport of his long arms and legs and his fierce, hard face was one kind of occupation; but to meet him in the berry bushes was another. Many was the youngun who came hightailing home with eyes popping and wind clean gone, gasping out the fearsome news that he had met Thin Jimmy amongst the brambles.

And children believed that Thin Jimmy could walk abroad at night even when the moon and stars were concealed by clouds, and that he had cat eyes to see around the tree trunks. He wore buckskin and linsey-woolsey; he had a coonskin cap all rough and scraggly atop his unshorn head.

Many's the time that he was seen loping through the woods like a scairt deer, when people came nigh. For he didn't understand that most of the younguns would have cut and run if he had said Boo; and he was shy and secretive and retiring through all the years of his growth.

He was found, sometimes, laying quiet beside the pools that formed behind fallen trees on the edges of Agony Creek. His moc-casins made tracks in strange places when snow was on the ground. As he grew older, he acquired himself a rifle-gun and was said to be skilful with it. Wild turkeys now cooked on Granny's fire, and rabbits stewed in their gravy whenever the old lady had a mind for such fare.

Far above six feet Thin Jimmy grew, before he was seventeen. His legs and arms and chest were thin, but they were hard as old hides at the tanner's. His hair hung dense and stringy to his shoulders, and the first fluff of manhood's beard showed like a grey lichen on his face.

He accumulated money too—at least in such amount as Granny Blackshears needed to purchase herself things of comfort. For he dug gentian roots and dried them, and carried quantities down to the trading store at Delight. It was a moment of wonderment when Thin Jimmy dropped his little pack upon the counter, and told the man to weigh what he had brought.

Yes, he must have been a comfort to poor old Granny

Blackshear's heart; she led a meagre life, except for him. Her only relation with other folks was when they were sick or when plentiful troubles roosted on their doorsills. She saw miseries through all her years, and devoted herself only to finding out the remedies if she could. And sometimes I wonder what she and the boy talked about, in the mysteriousness of nights when they sat within their home, and when there was no necessary curing to be done elsewhere. But it's certain fact that she taught Thin Jimmy to read and how to write his name, and more than that.

The Rosy Ridge medical doctor in those days, and the only doctor for miles around, was named Doctor Hardaway Mercer; you could make no joke about his name, for his way of life was never hard. He was a genial and good-tempered man unless badly aroused, and when highy-tighty folks used to assail the notion of what they called granny-izing and witch-doctoring, Doctor Hardaway Mercer would merely chuckle.

He'd say that where there was so much smoke, there must be some flame; he held opinion that Granny Blackshears did more good than harm, with all her roots and dried leaves and queer understandings.

'I reckon she ain't got a license,' Doctor Mercer would say. 'I reckon she doesn't know the oath of Hippocrates—but it's my belief that she observes it.' And then he'd laugh deep within his heavy chest and tug knowingly at his whiskers, and go striding up Agony Creek with a pole over his shoulder.

For he enjoyed angling after the tender little fish that flickered themselves amongst the coloured riffles, better than he did fishing for ailments in mankind's inner regions, though I reckon he was successful at both. He was a widower-man, and his pride and joy was in his little daughter Adela; and when she was grown up enough to trot along with him on his fishing, he had her trot.

There she stood one day, in the shallower flows of Agony Creek, and it was the same summer that Thin Jimmy Blackshears had come to be seventeen. Adela Mercer was only twelve, but her feet were the prettiest sight that the sleek little leeches and water skaters ever saw.

Her father had gone upstream to whip the quieter pools with his fly, and Adela had decided to catch herself some craw-daddies. She stood there with the water talking around her legs, and her long black hair hanging thick to her waist. Her hair was so black that the sun seemed to find silver shadows amidst its softness.

Her luck at craw-dad catching was bad, because she was fearful lest the craw-daddies nip her fingers. Then Thin Jimmy

Blackshears came from the willows, quieter than any water snake, and showed her how to catch them.

'Craw-dad nippers,' he said. 'They're mighty good. You keep them in your pocket, little girl, and you'll never suffer miseries of the stomach.'

Perhaps because she was so small and gentle and trusting, he took the little girl to a grassy place above the bank, and there he said he'd show her things. And he opened up a kind of pouch he carried within his clothes, and it was full of mixed-up wonders. There was a mad-stone and a snake-stone and a blood-stone, and there was a piece of turtle shell and some dried toenails, and even the white tooth of a bull.

And then he showed her what he wore around his neck upon a piece of greasy string: a squirrel's tooth to make him forecast the things to come, and a wolf's fang to make him brave. And sewed tight against his coonskin cap, he had a string of snake rattles; as long as he wore them, Thin Jimmy declared, his head would never ache. He had a dead spider, too, and pink pearls that came in clams. And the queerest thing of all was the stone which he called a toad-stone because it was shaped that way, and when he had it no poison could affect him.

Along with these preventions that he toted wherever he went, he understood that humankind is weak and subject to a million ills. He had learned a sight from Granny Blackshears about plants and herbs and Indian tonics, and he poured this wisdom out into the little girl's ears, as if he were glad to have someone to talk to.

But when her father came downstream and hailed the child, Thin Jimmy went slithering away into the thickets so fast that the little girl rubbed her eyes.

'Adela,' inquired Doctor Hardaway Mercer, 'Were you scairt of Thin Jimmy?'

She shook her head and said she wasn't scairt no way. But she clung close against her father's side as they went home; and after that she would never squint at a new moon through window glass without turning something over in her pocket; she dreamed about mad-stones on more nights than one.

And maybe Thin Jimmy Blackshears's dreams had been occupied solely with mad-stones and such implements, up until that time. But from then on, a small and skinny girl with calm brown eyes must have walked in them.

Naturally she was far too young for romancing, and in any case Thin Jimmy was far too savage and shy to think of courting any female mortal that ever breathed. Still, it can be imagined that he considered her hair glossier than the soft feathers of a blackbird,

and her voice as trusting and full of wonderment as the green peepers of spring when they played their fiddles in the grass.

A fat partridge found its way somehow to Doctor Mercer's front stoop, and there it lay when the doctor's sister by marriage, Miss Eulalie Kershaw, went out to sweep the step one fine morning. And later in the season there was a brace of plump squirrels, and people wondered that Thin Jimmy would have the courage to creep so close to civilization as the outskirts of Delight, to leave these gifts for the child who had touched his fancy.

And when spring moved over the land again, it was Adela Mercer herself who went frequently to the stoop to see if Thin Jimmy had fetched a present out of the forest. Sometimes there were violets and sometimes the little thread-flowers, paler and more delicate than any other wild thing a-growing; and once there were pearls from clam-shells taken out of the river far away. Things like this Adela kept as a kind of treasure. She had a coloured Christmas box in which she stored her ribbons and other girlish truck: the dried flowers given her by Thin Jimmy, and the pearls too, were cherished there.

Her aunt used to rare around at such doings—as season after season went by, with uncommon tributes laid before Adela's door.

'He's wild as a civet-cat,' she would cry in dudgeon to Doctor Mercer. 'He's the offspring of an old-witch-granny, and I doubt the wisdom of Adela's accepting presents from a timber-bred critter like him.'

But Doctor Mercer just laughed. He wanted to know if her aunt would have Adela kick the bouquets off the porch, and feed the game to the hog he was fattening.

'Never you mind,' cried Miss Eulalie. 'Adela is growing tall and comely all of a sudden, and it's time you gave serious thought to the matter. Why,' Miss Eulalie chattered away, 'there were a dozen young bucks rolling eyes at her, when we attended the last play-party at the Baggetts'. I'd sooner see her colouring up when one of the Billins boys looked at her.'

And it wasn't asking much to have that occur. For by the time Adela Mercer was in her earliest womanhood, the men of the neighbourhood would go far out of their way to pass her house and catch a glimpse of her behind the vines. And foremost in the crew rode young Letcher, second son of the Billinses.

There was a scad of Billins boys—twelve in all, when the record was complete—though some died when they were babes. But in those days there were Zeke and Letcher and Jack, grown more or less to man's estate, with three younguns trailing them. Their father was a substantial person who farmed good acres in

good fashion, and conducted a saw-mill into the bargain. But he ruled his boys with an easy hand, and most citizens agreed that he didn't rule them hard enough.

Certain it is that Letcher was a tribulation to the schoolmaster and a sore trial to other people in the community, when he outgrew his shirttail days. He had a claybank horse that he rode like greased lightning, and at the Christmas season Letcher and his ornery friends would get full of Christmas cheer and go whooping and shooting around the neighbourhood. They had a kind of band or army, those boys did, and called themselves the Bobcats, and every Bobcat wore a fur tail of that variety sewed to his hat.

They were nothing like so mean as the Dessark boys who galloped those hills in later periods; their inclinations were not towards robbery and murder, like the night-riders who followed them. But they hankered to make a noise in the world, and do frantic stunts, and perform pranks that quieter boys might shun. They were known to shoot gourds off each other's heads, and to frighten old ladies with ticktacs against their windows; and once five cats came into prayer-meeting, stepping high with paper boots tied on their feet, and it was the Bobcats who sent them there.

Old Doctor Mercer didn't mind their dangerous ways or their foolishness. 'Boys will be boys,' he said, although several of these were rapidly lengthening into manhood, and should have devoted themselves to soberer ambitions. And Doc wasn't annoyed when Letcher Billins started tying his claybank in front of the Mercer house, and coming in to amuse Adela with sprightly talk and circus tricks.

Miss Eulalie was in no way annoyed either: Abraham Billins was believed to be worth eight thousand in cold cash, and the saws in his mill hummed hourly as more and more people moved into the vicinity and felt the need of lumber. Zeke Billins was a sickly young man, and who knew how long he might last if a fever got hold of him? Letcher Billins was next-to-the-eldest, and doubtless he would settle into some kind of decency if he inherited the family fortunes.

Miss Eulalie had an eye to future comfort; she had an ear that could catch the ring of a thin dime clear across the neighbourhood. So she smiled when she saw that pale horse gnawing the fence palings, and she reckoned Letcher wasn't half so untamed as a certain thin person in buckskins who came creeping through the thickets to drop his wild flowers at the doorstep, and vanish away again without ever a soul laying eyes on him.

The gentian roots grew and the wild turkeys gobbled; fish still flicked themselves in the waters where Doc Mercer commonly sought them.

As for Thin Jimmy Blackshears, he spent his time in bottling hen's oil for Granny, and stewing up tobacco and mutton tallow as she needed them; and he was stripping out the inner bark of butternut trees and tincturing the blood-root, and counting crows upon the wing for weather prophecy, just as he always did.

And as for Adela Mercer, she had grown pretty and mildly plump; there was pink within her skin, and her eyes laughed when they looked at you. I don't know whether they laughed when she looked at Letcher Billins or not, but he was around there most of the time for her to look at. People said that Letcher was an eligible young man despite his crazy activities and his ornery ways with the Bobcats. What he needed in his life was a settling influence, and likely Adela Mercer would award it to him.

Bitter trials do not come singly as a rule, and now Doctor Hardaway Mercer had the first tribulation which had visited him since his wife died many years before. It came in the shape of a runaway back in Kentucky, where his only brother was mortally hurt, and the family wrote a letter to Doctor Mercer while his brother lay a-dying.

Mercer had to pack and go; it was a long journey; he had to tend his brother devotedly when he got there, and when the man died there were the children to see after, and a million business disturbances to straighten out for the widow.

And through all those weeks of worry, there was unhappiness occurring within. Hardaway Mercer's own home, nigh to the town of Delight. His child Adela was stricken with a misery. She thinned down unreasonably, and she complained of anguish in her side and under her shoulder. Her skin no longer looked as if rose petals lay upon it.

There were some people inclined towards sentimentality who said that she needed her father's return, as a sole and certain cure: motherless daughters were apt to hold their fathers close to their hearts, and perhaps Adela was pining for the doctor. There were others, more literal-minded, who declared that Miss Eulalie Kershaw's cooking was the cause of it all.

Well, Adela was sick enough; she wouldn't eat, and she experienced pain and fever. The only other doctor in the neighbourhood lived at Billingsgate, and he was a harsh man who had quarrelled with Hardaway Mercer on some matter of profession. Miss Eulalie Kershaw said she'd be blowed up with gunpowder

before she'd summon the Billingsgate man, and that she knew enough to cure any two girls the size of Adela.

She brought bottles from the doctor's shelves, and I reckon she used them all. She poured everything from Indian Cathartic Syrup to Colby's Cholera Tincture down that poor girl's throat. She gave her Wahoo Tonic and Wilson's English Worm Cakes, and she rubbed her back with Kittredge's Salve. She gave her Alcoholic Extract of Ignatia Amara, too.

But the prime cure she offered was Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup; Aunt Eulalie said if that didn't fetch Adela into bounding health, nothing else would. And the hollows under Adela Mercer's eyes grew deeper, and she lay listless upon her pillows.

No one of the neighbours dared to summon Granny Blackshears. Miss Eulalie Kershaw, with her specs and her big teeth and her loud voice, was now Adela's guardian, and Miss Eulalie held no brief for grannyizing.

'Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup has cured folks afore this,' said Miss Eulalie. 'Take it, child! It's good enough for what ails you.'

The neighbours grew alarmed. Mrs. Drummond it was who wrote to Doctor Mercer that he'd best hasten home from Kentucky and see to things, or else he'd have to stand beside a grave when he did come. It was miserable to observe the Mercer house, from whence good cheer and kindness and laughter had always come forth, now turned grim and silent—with the blinds pulled down and the daughter fever-ridden.

I reckon Letcher Billins was reasonably upset. He'd bounce in every day to see how Adela was faring, and once he brought her a bottle of scent, and another time a box of chocolate drops that he had rode all the way to Billingsgate to purchase for her. But it was whispered that other eyes than his watched the house on frequent occasions, and that a tall shape was heard to go rustling away through the leaves, close before dawn or after the dusk had fallen.

Sure enough, Jimmy Blackshears must have heard of Adela Mercer's ailment; and so had everybody else in the Rosy Ridge country. But Thin Jim was so withdrawn into his solitary pursuits that he dared not pull the Mercer latch-strings unbidden.

There came a night when Adela didn't know the neighbour women who waited nigh her bed, nor recognize her Aunt Eulalie. Her eyes stared through them as if they had been window-glass, and she quoted strange words aloud in her restlessness and in the pain of her sickness.

She spoke up through layers of fever, and she said that shoemakers' children never had shoes; she said that she was a

doctor's daughter—the child of a man who had cured many—but now there was no one to cure her.

Then Mrs. Andrew Drummond went a-flying home, to tell old Andrew of the weakness and danger that beset Adela, and how nigh she seemed coming to her end.

Andrew Drummond said angry words. He pulled on his boots and poured himself a drink from his flask.

'Aye,' he said, 'she's a winning lass, and I'll not be the man to stand idly by and see her come to harm! It's dark the night, and Eulalie Kershaw is an old rullion, but I'm away to fetch Granny Blackshears!'

Then up he rode, six miles along the chilly length of Rosy Ridge, and he was as angry and as frightened as any Scotchman could be—or any native Missourian either, for that matter. He knocked upon the door of Granny Blackshears's cabin, as so many other plaintive people had knocked before him. When the door opened, it was a man who lifted the latch, and Thin Jimmy was the man.

'No,' said he, 'Granny ain't to home, nor will she be. The Huck-step babe and mother are badly took, over at Lorn Widow, and she's there a-tending them.'

Sweat stood out on Andrew Drummond's forehead.

'Look you here, Thin Jimmy,' he cried, 'there's naught to be done for Adela Mercer but what your granny can do! Aye, the lass is wandering in her wits the night.'

Thin Jimmy stood there, tall and strange in his wool and buckskins, and he looked down at Mr. Drummond. 'She's bad took?'

'Weeks ago!' exclaimed Andrew Drummond. 'She's no better now. The fever was high within her when my woman left the house; and the poor bairn talks about her side, and she makes an ourie noise when she tries to breathe.'

Candlelight shone against Andrew Drummond's eyes, and he couldn't examine Thin Jimmy's face. 'Well, I can go down myself,' Thin Jimmy whispered, for all his shyness. 'It sounds as if it might be a liver inflammation.'

Old Andrew Drummond drew his tartan shawl close around his shoulders. 'Has your granny taught you, lad, aught of what she knows?'

'I reckon,' said Thin Jimmy, 'that she's taught me all.'

'Aye,' Drummond told him. 'I brought a led horse along. Fetch your paraphernalia, now, and come away with me.'

Thin Jimmy went to the far end of the cabin, and there were stored, on shelves and hooks and pegs, a million pokes and bottles and little bundles of bark and dried weeds. Most carefully he selected several things and wrapped them together; and he

fetch'd them all those miles down to the Mercer house, riding silent behind Andrew.

Adela was having a miserable time when they got there. Neighbour women had come into the room, and Mrs. Drummond had returned as well. Deliriousness no longer overcame Adela, though the appearance of her face was terrible to see, and her coughing too, and the pain with which she breathed. It was years since Thin Jimmy had stood nigh to her, for all the presents he had deposited on her stoop; she stared up, wondering out of her big brown eyes, and he looked just as wondering.

At last that wild young man did find his voice, and he asked her the questions he needed to ask, and he found just where the pain was plaguing her. The neighbour women got over their awe of him, and loosened up and told him things which Adela hadn't told about herself; although Miss Eulalie sat over by the lamp and glared and sniffed.

Then Thin Jimmy asked Andrew Drummond to lead him into the kitchen where the stove lids were red. He opened the bundles he had brought, and he took out handfuls of smartweed and wormwood and the bark of sumach roots, and these things Jimmy put into a pot to boil.

'They were gathered correct,' he said. 'They were gathered at the right time of the moon, and they were cured according to the ways that Granny knows. And now I'll do what I can. But in the meantime, here are some other medicines for you to put in her bed, and let her keep them nigh her all the time.' And he gave to Andrew Drummond a small dried potato, and a knuckle from a pig's foot, and a pair of craw-dad claws.

Well, that was witchery all right, but old Andrew was willing to grasp at any hope offered. So he wrapped them according to instructions, and his wife put them close beside Adela's body beneath the bedclothes.

Out from the kitchen appeared Thin Jimmy, and he had boiled the strength from the weeds and bark that were stewing; and then he had strained and boiled them further. He added lard too, and turpentine; but because he was a man and because he was scairt of all the world, and perhaps most especially of young females, he had Mrs. Drummond proceed from there.

The woman rubbed that stuff around the painful portions of Adela Mercer, and pressed a flannel cloth above the mixture again and again, and passed a hot iron over the flannel.

'You got to heat it in,' Thin Jimmy had cautioned her. 'You got to keep heating it in, or it will bring no relief to her internals.'

More kinds of doctoring he had ready to hand, and he em-

ployed them. He cooked up mandrakes and blue-flag roots, and another kind of root as well. That strange dose he made Adela swallow down soon after the salve was applied, and again before he left the house at dawn. Everybody on the eastern limits of Rosy Ridge had heard of his visit by that time, for it was a wondrous thing to think of Thin Jimmy shedding his retiring habits, and playing doctor to a girl that her Aunt Eulalie couldn't help no way.

And other people than the householders had heard of Thin Jimmy's adventure: the Bobcats were waiting for him in full force, with Letcher Billins at their head. Andrew Drummond had offered Thin Jimmy his horse for riding back home, but Thin Jimmy was accustomed to shanks's mare and said that he'd much prefer to leg it.

So he set off; and then as he passed the sycamores that grew beyond the turning of the road (and that still grow there in modern times) he came face to face with five young men who sat on their horses and stared at him.

Letcher Billins didn't hold with witch-doctoring, and most especially when he considered that the witch-doctor was rivalling him in Adela Mercer's affections. Letcher and his associates had attended a dance at Mammy Parks's place, far down the Billingsgate road, and more than a little corn liquor had flowed their way. Some young men wouldn't be eager for dancing when certain young ladies lay sick abed, but Letcher Billins was always quick to pride himself because of his light heart and risibilities.

And then he came back to Delight with the other Bobcats in tow. His insides were heated as if an iron had been passed across his skin instead of Adela's.

The Bobcats said, 'Thin Jimmy, we're eager to have a word with you', and Jimmy Blackshears was plumb astounded when he glimpsed them.

'Talk away,' he said. 'I'd take it kindly if you didn't talk too long, for I've six miles ahead of me.'

'You've more than that behind you, maybe,' said Letcher Billins, and the other boys ho-hoed to hear him say it. 'You've mad-stones and blood-stones and funny herbs, and all other kinds of rigmarole. You hain't no doctor; so I warn you to keep your spooky habits far removed from Miss Adela Mercer.'

And Thin Jimmy up and answered him, 'I'm trying to cure her of her misery.'

'Well enough, witch man,' said Letcher Billins. 'I don't misdoubt your intentions, I just don't desire you casting any spells.'

Thin Jimmy folded his arms across his flat chest and looked

hard at them all. His eyes went back in his head. 'If I can cast a spell that will heal her body,' he said, 'I'd count myself fortunate. And if it can be done with pigs' knuckles or blue-flag or wormwood, I aim to do it.'

Well, he looked mighty purposeful. The Bobcats hadn't yet lashed themselves into any devilment, so they pulled their horses aside and let Blackshears pass until he had vanished in the Rosy Ridge direction.

But then they got to talking amongst themselves, and they joked Letcher Billins unmercifully about such goings on.

'How would you like it,' one of the Tinley boys inquired of Lane Cutts, 'if your girl was being magicked away from you?' He said it sly, but loud enough for Letcher Billins to hear, and Letcher pulled his mouth down tight.

He invited his cronies over to the saw-mill shack to wet their whistles before they rode for home, and I reckon the whistles thought they needed a lot of wetting.

They sat around with a jug or two, for a couple of hours. Dell Tinley said that he had heard of a youngun who was cured of heart ailments by having a hole drilled into a blue beech tree and some of his hair stuffed into the hole; and Angie Steedman swore that there wasn't anything better to stop the flowing of a bloody wound than seven spider webs laid acrost it, especially if the webs had been spun in November.

Thus they kept on rallying Letcher Billins and reciting magic words and mumble-jumble, until about nine o'clock Letcher got up and heaved his empty jug against the stove.

He ripped out his knife and carved the air around his head, and he braved, 'Any man who says I'll stand by and let Adela be witch-doctored to her death, has got to give me the first bite! I'm going up there on Rosy Ridge and open that critter's carcass, and see if he's actually plagued with moonbeams!'

So the rest all swore that they would go along. They went squawling away up the hill road, past the Drummond house and the Macbean place and then west along the trail that we call Lovers' Walk.

The cold morning air soaked a little soberness into their arms and legs. They were steady enough, but they weren't yet kindly of heart; and when they grouped their horses around the Blackshearses' cabin they were still fighting mean.

Letcher Billins, most of all, was enraged at the meddling manners of Thin Jimmy.

'Unbar your door!' he yelled. 'Lock up your spooks in their swill barrels, Jimmy Blackshears. Come outside and say us a miracle!'

Thin Jimmy was sound asleep when they began their outcry, but it didn't take him long to blink the sleep from his eyes. He put on some duds, though not many, and he opened the door most steady. He stood there with his bare chest shining in the morning sun.

'Well, well,' Letcher Billins told him, 'do my eyes deceive me? You look just like an ordinary human, without your shirt, although the hair doesn't grow as thick as it might.'

And Jimmy Blackshears asked them quiet, 'Why do you folks make so much rumpus? Is somebody sick?'

Billins leaned down over his horse's neck and he narrowed his gaze. 'Adela Mercer is sick,' he said. 'She'll be sicker if you continue doctoring her. I've come up to warn you to keep your distance from that house, with all your toad-ears and skunk-musk and turtle-feet!'

Thin Jimmy turned pale; it was the paleness of eager rage, and the Bobcats had no sense to understand his feelings.

'I want to cure her,' he said, 'because she's mighty sweet and mighty pretty. And I reckon I'll cure her, too, for I know the medicine she needs.'

Then Letcher Billins turned around on his horse and pleaded with the other Bobcats to observe how he held his temper. 'And you, Thin Jimmy,' he said. 'I reckon I ought to shoot you in your tracks, or slice the ears from off your head. You set foot in the Mercer yard again and you'll need more than a blood-stone to cure you!'

It is hard to tell what went on in Thin Jimmy Blackshears's mind, for he had never exchanged angriness with anyone so far as known; never before had he been challenged or ordered about his business. He knew the milk-snakes of the gullies better than he knew the manners of human beings . . . he knew the kind of voices that none of the Bobcats could speak with. And he wore a wolf's fang, to make him brave.

He eased forward and he put his hand on Letcher Billins's bridle with all earnestness. 'I've never had trouble with no man,' he said. 'I've never courted troublesome doings. But don't let none of your friends halt me on my path towards Adela Mercer's, for most surely I will kill any man who gets in my way.'

There was something clabbering about the way he said it, and the other Bobcats kind of slunk behind Letcher. But the corn was still going around inside Letcher's head. So he reached for his knife, and let out a yell that should have frightened any ordinary mortal off the face of the earth.

Then Jimmy's long fingers closed around Billins's leg, and the next moment Letcher Billins hit the ground, and his horse went

skipping off in fair astonishment. Tooth and claw and kick and jab, bite and bump and choke and squeeze—that was the way Thin Jimmy fought, and in another minute Letcher Billins's knife went sailing over the roof tree.

Now I'll never say where Jimmy Blackshears got his lessons in tussling, and certainly no other child had ever rolled and cuffed with him when he was growing up. Maybe he learned his strategies amidst the brush, as he watched the deer a-fighting in that season when their necks swelled. And maybe he had absorbed knowledge of scimmages when he saw the dog mink go for one another, and the black-headed robins too.

He didn't spare a hold or restrain himself from any gouge. Still, that was more or less the fashion of fighting in those days. And the Bobcats were armed. . . .

Then he and Letcher were on their feet. Letcher lifted a kick that would have torn Thin Jimmy's jaw plumb out of his chin, if it had struck him. But the wild man caught Billins's boot when it came up, and he sent Letcher a-rolling. Now two more Bobcats were on him, and one of them was mean enough to have his knife out. It gashed Thin Jimmy's arm, but he took it away, and a bone snapped when he took it.

The other young bucks dove off their horses. They skirmished around, hunting for a chance. They found black eyes and bloody noses and torn lips instead, and they lost the air out of their lungs when Jimmy's heel came against them.

He fought his way backward to the cabin door; I reckon he had a notion that his rifle was inside, and he would have used it too, for he considered that he was fighting for Adela Mercer's life as hard as ever he might. Oh, there would have been bloodshed of a more grievous kind, and somebody would have died; that much is sure.

But then there came the knocking of a horse's feet against the hard ground, and a tall man with white whiskers rode up abreast of the cabin door. He roared at the fighting men to hold themselves steady.

It was Doctor Hardaway Mercer, fresh come from Kentucky, and fresher come from his daughter's bedside. Like most men who rode abroad on lonely missions in the early days, he toted a pocket pistol; and now he levelled it, and desired all and sundry to hold their hands aloft.

They did it, too, though everybody was bleeding sore.

For a while the doctor sat glowering. The Bobcats were hanging their heads as if they realized already the wrong that they had committed.

'I heard it all,' Doc Mercer told them, 'and how you desired to come up here and show your wrath to a man who has done me the service of his life! You may not know it, Letcher Billins, but Adela was sitting-up right peart by the time I arrived this morning, and she begged for chicken broth and biscuits. They say she was at death's door only last night before Thin Jimmy tended her.'

'Well,' said Letcher Billins, lowering his hand long enough to wipe away the blood from his nose. 'I don't hold with witch-doctoring. I didn't want him casting spells over Adela.'

'He can cast any spells he wants to,' said Doc Mercer, with his voice trembling. 'I presume he knows that, now. I suggest that you Bobcats waltz for home and get yourselves cured up, if you can. This will make a tall tale in our community: one man against five, and damn near whipping the daylight out of you!'

But then he relented, for Doc Mercer's bark was always worse than his bite. He clumb down off his horse and put his pistol away and said that he'd patch them all up if he could. But before he would lay a finger on Letcher or the Tinleys or any of that crowd, he bandaged the gash in Thin Jimmy's arm.

And he talked all the time he was messing around with the wounded. He said, 'Flag root and wormwood—that's what Andrew Drummond said was used. . . . Smartweed and wormwood and sumach roots, boiled down and mixed with turpentine and lard. Well, it would have its values; I can understand that. I say nothing whatsoever,' he added cautiously, 'about the therapeutic importance of pigs' knuckles and craw-dad claws.'

At last the Bobcats traipsed for home, looking cheap and feeling cheaper. They went into retirement from their activities for quite a spell. It wasn't a brave story to be borne around the neighbourhood—how the five of them had mighty nigh failed to lick one lone Thin Jimmy. And from that time on, Letcher Billins's clay-bank horse had to chaw other palings besides those at the Mercers'.

Back in the Blackshearses' cabin, old Doctor Mercer put his arm around Thin Jimmy. 'She'll do well enough, boy,' he said. 'I'm here at last, thank God, to look after her. . . . Mandrakes and blue-flag roots! Well, apparently there's something to that dose, taken internally, and I'd better look into it right prompt. I want you to come down to the house and you can dwell there for a spell, with your cut arm and all, until Granny Blackshears gets home.'

They travelled the trail that leads east down Rosy Ridge, with Doctor Mercer's horse a-carrying double.

He said to Thin Jimmy, 'Craw-daddies and dead spiders and

dried potatoes! That's magic, young man and worthless, and not to be tampered with anyhow. . . . But you can read, and how would you like to ride around on professional calls with me and read *Materia Medica* while you do it?

Well, Thin Jimmy thought he would like to try that well enough. And then he owned that he had a little money too, if his medical education would cause expense. For he had saved four hundred and seventy-three dollars from selling gentian roots and such valuables, and he had buried it under the floor.

They say that Miss Eulalie Kershaw adopted a different tone, when she heard about that money. Four hundred and seventy-three dollars was quite a sum in those days; and I'd like to have that much in my pocket now.

Thereupon happiness began for all concerned, although Granny Blackshears scowled to think of Thin Jimmy deciding with superior knowledge that there was no benefit in dried potatoes or craw-dad claws. She held that they possessed important virtues, to the end of her days.

And thus Thin Jimmy became a doctor, back in those early times before the War. And thus Adela became a doctor's wife; and almost the first patient Doctor Blackshears had was Letcher Billins, who had been up to some prank or other. He came seeking the extraction of bird-shot which an angry neighbour had fired into his southernmost portions.

WITCHCRAFT TRADITIONS

'A mere broomstick's ride from Central London is the Essex Witch County, an extensive, low-lying area between the River Thames and the River Stour which separates Essex from Suffolk.

This was once a breeding ground for the "black arts" and became the scene of some of the most memorable witch hunts in English history. Many apparently unexceptional towns and villages that are now within London's commuter belt, were coloured by fear and superstition. Suspected witches were dragged from their cottages for interrogation and, sometimes, summary execution, while their former friends and neighbours became persecutors themselves.

Cases of this character left a legacy of superstition in Essex life. In many of the small towns there are traditions of witchcraft which continue even today . . .'

ERIC MAPLE,
In Britain



Writer's Witch

JOAN FLEMING

Amyas gave a loud cry of pain and held his head in anguish; Mrs. Pegg looked round the door.

'Anything wrong, sir?' she asked with concern. It being a weekday she was not wearing her teeth and, for the same reason, upon her head she wore her husband's old cap, round the edge of which her curlers bobbed playfully. Her face took on a look of shocked disapproval at what she heard. 'Anything wrong?' she asked again, sharply.

Amyas stopped cursing and looked up, but the apparition which he saw through watering eyes in no way mitigated his pain.

'Yes, everything's wrong!' he shouted. 'I've just knocked myself nearly senseless on that blasted beam again!'

Mrs. Pegg made a curious sucking noise with her gums, intended, no doubt, to convey sympathy. 'Tch! Tch! Your pore forehead! 'Ow about a spot of magic?'

Amyas dismissed the kindly suggestion with a snarl, and Mrs. Pegg wisely held her peace whilst the pain wore off.

Her silent sympathy caught Amyas off his guard; for three weeks he had fought against an ever-increasing irritation and an urgent need to ease himself by bursting into angry complaint. Now he ceased to fight any longer.

'I must have been mad, utterly mad, ever to take this lousy little hovel, and to think I was going to be able to write here! Peace and quiet was all I wanted, but I didn't expect to knock myself silly on these confounded beams every half-hour—'

Mrs. Pegg waited; she sniffed, she wiped her nose with the corner of her apron. Then, with great restraint, she said: 'No, you're not yourself, sir.'

Amyas looked sharply at her. Who was she (their acquaintance

being of some three weeks' standing) to know whether he was himself or not?

However, his need to talk was greater than his discretion, and he went on bitterly: 'But I've got to be myself, I can't go on like this! Either I sit at the typewriter doing nothing at all, or else I start moving about and knock myself out, and it won't do. As you may know, Mrs. Pegg,' he said sternly, 'last year I wrote a best-seller,' pause for effect, 'and this year I must write another. My publisher is waiting for it, thousands of people are waiting for it, and here I am, the stage set, producing nothing, nothing at all! Not one word since I came. It's all here, mind you,' he said, tapping his forehead, 'or was, but I can't get going!'

Mrs. Pegg made her sympathetic noise. She was pregnant with talk; Amyas had known it all along; up till now he had taken immense pains to avoid any sort of mental contact with her. She was, however, an excellent cook, so he sighed heavily, and prepared for the broadside.

'It beats me,' she said, 'how a gent like you could take a place like this, though, *mind you*, it's not lousy now! The council 'as been ever so thorough.'

Still nursing his head, but ceasing to rock himself gently to and fro, Amyas asked: 'What did you say?'

'I said the council spread themselves, like, over getting this place what you'd call dee-loused,' Mrs. Pegg replied in a louder tone.

'You don't mean it was really lousy!' Amyas exclaimed, sitting up, his pain forgotten.

'But you've just said so yourself, sir; "lousy little 'ovel" was wot you called it, and lousy little 'ovel it was; only tramps 'as lived in it these past 'undred years, till it was condemned.'

'Condemned!'

'For years,' Mrs. Pegg went on cheerfully; 'but it didn't fall to ruin like it might of; stone-built, that's why. Then wot with the 'ousing shortage *excetra*, the council dee-condemned it for the evacuees, see?'

Amyas nodded. He saw only too clearly. He had spent but one week-end at the *Crown*, seen the cottage, bought it and, at infinite trouble and expense, had had it 'done up.' He looked round the tiny sitting-room, at the uneven brick floor, the eau-de-nil chintz curtains, the dark oak of the bureau, the shining surface of the gate-legged table, and on it the copper bowl with the nasturtiums foaming from it and tumbling over the side to peer at their reflections in the deep polish.

'Condemned!' he whispered.

'But I must say this,' Mrs. Pegg went on; 'mind you, it's a nice little job now, apart from the garden, which you naturally haven't had time to deal with yet'—she looked out through the open door on to the grass plot surrounded by the high brick wall. On either side of the flagged central path the grass was high and a few gnarled fruit trees grew neither fruit nor leaf, but, bowed beneath a weight of years, they were covered with a soft grey lichen which blurred their aged outline. 'Yes, apart from the garden, it's marvellous, reely, sir,' Mrs. Pegg mused, 'what you've done in the short time——'

Amyas lifted his head wearily from his hands and, leaning back in his chair, with a heavy sigh he said: 'Why didn't anybody tell me all this?' But even as he said it he knew it was a foolish question. Had he sought or desired anyone's opinion? Had he ever laid himself open to advice or criticism from anyone in the village? Had he not deliberately avoided the bar of the *Crown* where he might have been given much useful information about the cottage he was buying?

Mrs. Pegg, Amyas thought, was brewing for something. She was poking primly about the bosom of her pink woollen jumper, a sign, he had learned, that a subject of importance was about to be broached. She would fidget thus when about to discuss her wages or how much money Amyas proposed letting her have for 'the housekeeping'.

'You wouldn't of found anyone in the village as would of wanted to talk about the place,' she said at last. 'It's unlucky!' And she continued to poke primly, knowing that she had, at last, roused Amyas's full attention. 'Yes, unlucky!' she repeated, mouth-ing the word with enjoyment. 'The evacs didn't——'

'The what?'

'The evacuees—theyv didn't stay long, I can tell you, and then the Army used the place, as an ammunition store, they said, and that scared everyone nearly out of their wits and no one dared even mention the place, *in case*——'

'Yes? In case what?'

'In case!' Mrs. Pegg repeated in a hoarse whisper.

'Is this some sort of joke?' Amyas asked coldly. 'Explain yourself, Mrs. Pegg.'

A curious look passed over Mrs. Pegg's face. 'All right,' she said (rather nastily, Amyas thought), 'I'll tell you and be blowed! It isn't me as 'as to sleep 'ere nights.' Glancing swiftly to right and to left, she moistened her thin lips and leaned forward. 'It's Mary Ann Beehag! She's never left the place, not since she was 'ung at the cross-roads more nor a 'undred years ago!'

'Ah, I see,' Amyas said in his most superior voice; 'a thief, I suppose.'

'No, not a thief. They 'ung her at the cross-roads on the way to Marley because that's where the gallows 'appened to be and that's what caused it. There weren't no gallows here, see? She'd never set foot out of this village since she was born under this very roof, and they went and took 'er 'alf-way to the next village and 'ung 'er!'

'Why, exactly, was she—er—hung?' Amyas asked, hating the misuse of the verb, but keeping in touch with Mrs. Pegg mentally.

Again the look passed over Mrs. Pegg's face which he could only describe as primitive.

'She was a very bad old woman,' she said, then she wiped her nose once more with the corner of her apron and turned to leave the room.

Now thoroughly intrigued, Amyas called after her, but she did not come back. He got up and followed her into the tiny kitchen, where she was putting the finishing touches to the salad which she was leaving for his supper.

Amyas leaned against the wall with its brightly shining new cream paint and thrust his hands into his pockets.

'In what way,' he asked, 'was she bad?'

'Mary Ann Beehag? She was famous!' Mrs. Pegg said. 'The last of her kind in the county, so they say, to be 'ung.'

'"Of her kind"?'

'Aye,' she replied, giving a lettuce leaf a vigorous shake, 'and a good thing too!'

'"Of her kind"?' Amyas persisted.

'See here, sir,' Mrs. Pegg said, stopping her work and looking squarely at Amyas. 'Don't a-go stirring up mud. Least said soonest mended, eh? Walls have ears!'

'I simply don't know what you're driving at,' Amyas said, taking out his cigarette-case.

'You will,' Mrs. Pegg told him, briskly plucking off her apron and hanging it on a hook behind the kitchen door.

'I'm surprised at you, Mrs. Pegg,' Amyas replied, flicking at his lighter; 'you, with your electric cooker, and your wireless, and your television, and your bus drive into town to the pictures every week, I really am surprised at your superstitions and your innuendoes—' He could feel her getting angry; no one likes having long words thrown at them by a superior voice. Amyas was beginning to enjoy himself; goading Mrs. Pegg was poor sport, but better than sitting in front of a typewriter clawing at

the blank spaces in one's mind. 'Are you trying to tell me that she was hanged for a witch?'

Silence, whilst Mrs. Pegg fidgeted with something in her black mackintosh bag.

'If so,' Amyas went on, 'I am not merely surprised but shocked. Do you know'—he was about to say 'my good woman,' but stopped himself in time—'do you know that thousands of poor harmless old women were—er—hung or burned for being, as they say, *witches*? Poor innocent women like—er—like yourself; tortured and put to death by hysterical, superstitious crowds—'

Mrs. Pegg was eyeing him with dislike and Amyas stopped abruptly.

'Mary Ann Beehag wasn't no pore innercent old woman,' she declared soberly, 'she was an evil witch. Evil as the devil 'imself.' She opened the kitchen door, hung her black bag over her arm, and looked out at the brilliant afternoon, then with her hand still on the latch she glanced back over her shoulder. 'And the sun shone,' she pronounced, '*right through 'er*!'

Amyas gave a shout of laughter as the kitchen door slammed and he heard her feet on the flags outside.

'*"The sun shone right through her!"*' he repeated, with delight.

Ducking his head carefully in the doorway, he returned to the sitting-room and sat down in front of his typewriter.

Gradually the amusement and the animation of the last few minutes left him and he sat, sulky and dejected, lighting cigarette after cigarette and writing not one word. Dully, he turned over the pages of his notes headed 'Outline of Plot,' which were so drearily familiar to him, and then, with sudden decision, he gathered the loose pages together and tore them across.

'Dammit, it's rubbish!' he shouted.

He stood up, tearing the paper across again and again, and, clutching the pieces in his hand, he strode to the door leading out into the sunlit garden.

Crash went his head against the beam across the threshold, and this time it brought him to his knees, half in and half out of the doorway; everything went black, and there were brilliant flashes in the blackness.

Seeing stars, Amyas thought, like the kids in *Comic Cuts* when they bang themselves. But this won't do! It won't have to go on!

He opened his eyes, and there, in the middle of the flagged garden-path, stood Mary Ann Beehag, looking at him.

And Amyas looked at her.

'What are you doing in my house?' she croaked.

'Trying to write a novel,' Amyas answered; 'a best-seller!'

She gave a cackle of shocking, fiendish laughter.

'What's that you have in your hand?'

Amyas looked at his hand, carefully and stupidly, as though he were drunk. It was full of torn scraps of paper.

'The "Outline of Plot".'

Mary Ann Beehag extended a frightful claw; it was misshapen, gnarled and covered with soft grey lichen which could not hide its aged outline.

Amyas snatched his hand away. He was still kneeling on the threshold. A feeling of cold, dreadful horror came over him.

'Look!' he shrieked, 'look!' and Mary Ann Beehag laughed again, a cold, rustling laugh, like the wind in dead leaves.

Amyas's teeth began to chatter. 'The sun shines,' he mumbled, 'right through her!'

For the old woman stood in brilliant sunshine, and not to the front of her, nor behind her, nor to the sides of her, was there any shadow.

Mary Ann Beehag laughed again, and this time the sound scraped the inner linings of his soul. She said: 'Yes, only the evil cast no shadow, young man! Give me those—*those*,' she repeated impatiently.

Slowly Amyas put out his hand and dropped the torn fragments of his notes into her extended claw, then he watched, fascinated, as she shuffled down the path, a few steps through the long grass, and stooped under one of the dead trees.

'They're buried now,' she shrieked maliciously, and she laughed again—a laugh that reminded Amyas of a certain book reviewer who had slated his last novel. 'They're buried now, and we shall see what grows there——'

P.S.—Amyas and his publisher are still waiting.

WIZARD GETS HIS JOB BACK

'Robert Williams,¹ who admits he is a practising warlock, won reinstatement this week-end in his job as chief psychologist at Kansas State Industrial Reformatory.

The institution, which dismissed him in January, was ordered by the State Civil Service Commission to give him his old job back and reimburse him for lost salary.

During a commission hearing Mr. Williams contended that he was dismissed by the reformatory after it became public knowledge that he was a warlock. He argued that this was a violation of the State's anti-discrimination law.

But the reformatory superintendent, Mr. Kenneth Olice, maintained that the psychologist was dismissed because he had lost his ability to work with prisoners after the disclosure.

Mr. Williams, a psychologist at the reformatory since 1968, said he was initiated as a warlock last August. His beliefs did not include devil worship, nor did they allow animal sacrifice.'

*New York Post,
March 1974*

The Power of the Job

LARRY M. HARRIS

The office wasn't very bright or sunny, but that didn't matter. In the first place, if Gloria really wanted sun, she could always get some by tuning in on a mind outside, someone walking the streets of downtown New York. And, in the second place, the weather wasn't important; what mattered was how you felt inside. Gloria took off her beret and crammed it into a drawer of her desk. She sat down, feeling perfectly ready for work, her bright eyes sparkling and her whole twenty-one-year-old body eager for the demands of the day.

It was ten minutes to nine in the morning.

On the desk was a mass of reports and folders. Gloria looked at them and sighed; the cleaning woman, she thought, must have upset everything again.

But neatness was the keystone of good, efficient work in any field. Gloria set to work rearranging everything in a proper order. The job took her nearly twenty minutes and, by the time she was finished, the office was full.

Mr. Fredericksohn hadn't arrived yet, naturally. He always came in around nine-thirty. But all of the case workers were ready for the day's work. Gloria looked around the office at them, beaming. It was good to be able to help people and to know that what you were doing was right.

She remembered wondering how you could be sure you were right about somebody else, if you couldn't read minds. But, then, these were rules to go by, and all of the fine classes and textbooks that a social case worker had to have. If you paid attention, and if you really wanted to help people, Gloria supposed, it was all right. Certainly everything in her own office seemed to run smoothly.

Not that she would ever do anything about another worker, no

matter what. Gloria remembered what Mr. Greystone, a teacher of hers had said, a year or so before: 'Never interfere with the case load of another worker. Your sole job is represented by your own case load.'

That was good advice, Gloria thought. And, anyhow, her assistance didn't seem to be too badly needed, among the others. She had quite enough to do in taking care of her own clients.

And here she was, wasting time! She shook her head and breathed a little sigh, and began on the first folder. Name: GIRONDE, JOSE R.

Name: *Wladek, Mrs. Marie Posner*. She was no fool. She knew about the reports they had to make, and the sheets covered with all the details of your very own private life; she had seen them on a desk when she had come to keep her appointment. Mrs. Wladek was her name, and that was how the report would look, with her name all reversed in order right on the top. And underneath that there would be her address and her story, all that she had told the case workers, set right down in black and white for anybody at all to read.

When you were poor, you had no privacy, and that was the truth. Mrs. Wladek shook her head. A poor old woman, that was all that she was, and privacy was a luxury not to be asked for. Who said the United States was different from the old country?

Cossacks, she thought. In the old country, one still heard the old stories, the streets paved with gold and the food waiting for such as yourself; oh, the war had not changed that in the least. Now the Voice of America was heard in the old country—she had a letter, smuggled out, from her own second-cousin Marfa, telling her all about the Voice of America—and that was only another trap. They wanted to make you leave your own land and your own country, and come far away to America and to the United States, so that you would have no friends and you would be defenceless.

Then you could not help yourself. Then you had to do what they asked you, because there was no other way to eat. There were no friends to feed you dinners or to allow you room in a good house. No. There was only the case worker with her reports that took the last bit of privacy away from an old woman, and left her with barely enough money to remain alive.

'Get a job,' they said. 'Tell your son to get a job. He is young and strong and healthy.'

Certainly! But the United States is not a place in which to work. The United States will give you money. This fact she had

from her Uncle Bedrich, who had come to the new country years before, and who had written many letters back to his family before his death in an accident.

Should she, then, work? Should her own son, her own Rudi, be forced to work out his time of youth? Surely a little privacy was a small enough thing to surrender for freedom and ease?

But that they should ask for you to surrender it . . . *Cossacks!*

Mrs. Wladek stood up carefully—her old bones creaked, and she could feel them creaking. She looked around the tiny living-room, covered with dust. One should have the money to hire a maid. But the case workers had never understood that. Young things, of course they knew nothing of the troubles facing an old woman.

An old woman needed a maid.

She laughed briefly to herself at the idea, and realized at the same time that she had been hiding her own thoughts from herself.

Today was her appointment day, and the new one would be there, blonde and young and smiling at her with the innocent face. There was something wrong with the new one; she could see that. In the old country there were stories—

Are you, Marie Wladek, afraid of a young woman? Does your age count for nothing? Does your experience and knowledge count for nothing?

And yet, she had to admit to herself that she was afraid, and she was afraid of giving a name to her fear. Only a fool could mock at the stories told in the old country, and Mrs. Wladek knew of such a fool; he had died with mockery on his lips, but all had known what had killed him.

Can you not battle a young woman, and win, Marie Wladek?

And yet the young woman had something strange about her, and Mrs. Wladek remembered the old stories, and thought of witchcraft.

Who could fight witchcraft?

Even when the witch was a young girl without experience, and with an innocent face and blonde hair—

Mrs. Wladek looked at the mantel clock she had brought with her across the ocean. It told perfect time; it was as good as everything from the old country. Here in America they had no such clocks. Here everything ran by electricity, and when you touched it there was a shock, which was unnatural.

The old clock told the time: nine-thirty. Appointment hour was approaching. Mrs. Wladek did not want to leave the house. She did not want to face this new case worker.

But, all the same, one had to have money to live.

That they should force an old woman to travel across the city and to speak with a girl, by appointment, solely in order to get the money which should have been hers by right!

Cossacks! Monsters!

Name: GIRONDE, JOSE R.

Address: 1440 Hamilton Street

Borough: New York

Phone: None

Complaint: Client is over fifty, without work for eight months—last worked in October—due to recurrent difficulty regarding back. Sole support wife and wife's sister. One child (Ramon, 27), living on West Coast. Preliminary inquiries fail to locate child.

Remarks: NPH. Examination needed. Is back injury chronic?

There was a great deal of paper work needed, Gloria realized. At first she hadn't liked the paper work at all, but she could see now how necessary it was. After all, everybody wasn't like her; the other workers, she knew, didn't have her particular talent, and they had to write things down for fear they'd forget.

Sometimes Gloria felt very sorry for the other case workers. But she knew they were doing their very best, and they were, after all, helping people. That was the only important thing: to help people, to make them better members of society.

Now, Jose Gironde's back injury was certainly chronic. Gloria tried to remember the medical term for it: it was something to do with a lordosis. She'd paid no attention to that, since she had been trying to fix up the back instead.

But now a doctor had to be called, and a thorough examination had to be given, all so that the records would show what Gloria knew already. A case worker couldn't fill out a medical report; you had to be a doctor to do that.

And it didn't matter, Gloria knew, if you had all the information at your fingertips, and even knew more than the doctor. (Gloria could have cured Jose Gironde's back easily; a doctor couldn't do that.) Examination was the doctor's job.

It was like being a member of a team, Gloria thought.

That felt good.

She got out the list of doctors which all the case workers used, and followed it down with her finger. Dr. Willmarth was free, she knew, on Thursday morning at eleven.

Luckily, Jose Gironde was free at the same hour. She made a note to call the doctor and make an appointment, and to clear the

appointment with Jose Gironde, and made a duplicate note on the report sheet.

That would take care of that.

The paper work, after all, wasn't so very hard. All she had to do now was to make the actual calls, and then wait for the written result of the examination. When that had come through, she would be able to recommend Jose Gironde for permanent relief, as was obviously indicated in his case.

The back injury could not be corrected by medical science. And if Gloria were to correct it—

'Your job as a case worker is clearly defined,' a teacher had said. 'Meddling in another's province, without the permission of your supervisor, is always uncalled for.'

In other words, Gloria thought, the *status quo* has to be kept. And that, too, made sense when you thought about it.

She looked up to see Harold Meedy smiling across the room at her. She smiled back, very briefly, and went back to her own work.

'Interpersonal relationships within the office framework,' a teacher—Mr. Greystone?—had said, 'are fraught with danger, and should be handled with the greatest care.'

If Harold Meedy wanted to get acquainted with her, that was his affair. She didn't feel that she could conscientiously encourage him in the slightest. Not only was he a fellow worker, which made the whole situation more complicated than it would ordinarily have been, but he was a small pudgy man with pimples and an earnest expression. He looked as if he would be a bore, and a difficult person to get rid of.

He was.

Gloria just didn't think he was exactly her type.

And if he went on trying, she thought regretfully, she would be forced to do something about it. Of course, Meedy would never know the difference, but even so, Gloria didn't like to do any unnecessary work. Changing someone's mind was a delicate job, and a responsible one, not to be undertaken for a small motive.

Even if the person never knew his mind had been changed at all—

Mrs. Wladek, in her apartment, shrugged on an old coat and compressed her lips with weariness. Appointment time was near, and a person had to be punctual.

Even when a person was going to see a young girl who was strange and frightening, and who might do—

Well, *don't be a foolish old woman*, Mrs. Wladek told herself.

Rudi would have told her that. But Rudi was out somewhere with a girl or with some of his friends, like a good American boy.

Don't be a foolish old woman, Rudi would have said.

But Mrs. Wladek was frightened.

It was nearly ten o'clock, Gloria noticed. She did not feel in the least tired; she was still eager and ready for work. She decided she had time for one more folder before the first of her appointments arrived.

She reached out for it and saw Mr. Fredericksohn coming in the door. He smiled at her, a tall, white-haired man with a square face, who radiated enormous efficiency and a certain distant friendliness.

She did not say hello, but merely nodded. Mr. Fredericksohn liked to take the initiative himself, in all relationships.

'How are we doing today?' he said, peering over her shoulder.

'Fine,' she said happily. 'Just fine.'

Mr. Fredericksohn grunted. 'I see Mrs. Wladek's on your schedule today.'

'That's right,' she said.

'Just do what you can,' he said. 'You've seen her before, haven't you?'

She nodded. 'Once. Last week.'

'She's a problem—,' he said. Mr. Fredericksohn was always a little chary of saying anything that might be construed as derogatory to a client, even in the privacy of professional conversation.

'I'm sure we'll be able to work things out,' Gloria said.

'Well,' Mr. Fredericksohn said, and paused. Then he nodded. 'You do what you can,' he said. His voice sounded doubtful.

She beamed up at him. 'I certainly will,' she said with enthusiasm.

Mr. Fredericksohn nodded and muttered something, and went on by.

Gloria smiled. Oh, she was going to show Mr. Fredericksohn, all right! He just wasn't sure she could handle Mrs. Wladek—and the old woman certainly did represent a problem. Her folder was full of notations by case worker after case worker. But Gloria's smile broadened just a trifle.

My goodness, everything was going to be all right. She was sure Mr. Fredericksohn would be happy with her work.

Though the important thing wasn't her own success, but the people themselves. If you could help them to be bright, and

happy, and successful, then that was the best job in the world.
And she could.
My goodness, yes.

Mrs. Wladek looked at the door for a long time without opening it. She didn't want to go in—certainly not. But there was her appointment, and money was needed; she had no choice. The cossacks of America had forced her to this pass, and she was an old woman; what could she do? Fight them?

One had to give in.

She reached for the doorknob and turned it and opened the door.

There were all the desks, and the men and women working. And near the far corner, on the left, the girl sat studying a sheet of paper. Mrs. Wladek looked at the blonde hair and the pretty face and the slight figure, and shivered.

But she had no choice; she went across the room and when she had almost reached the desk the girl said: 'Good morning, Mrs. Wladek.'

How had she known? Mrs. Wladek had made no sound in walking to the desk. Yet the girl had known someone was there, and who that someone was, before her head had been raised. Truly, the girl was frightening.

Mrs. Wladek eased herself, feeling her bones creak, into a chair at the side of the desk. She said nothing. 'How are things going?' the girl said in her pleasant smooth voice.

'I am fine,' Mrs. Wladek said deliberately. She did not inquire about the girl's health. That would show her; that impoliteness would show her what an old woman thought of her!

'That's good,' the girl said. 'That's very good. And how is Rudi?'

'Rudi is my son,' Mrs. Wladek said.

'I know that,' the girl said, and smiled. 'We met last week, don't you remember?'

'I remember you,' Mrs. Wladek said. Then, grudgingly, she added: 'Rudi is the same. He is fine.'

'That's fine,' the girl said. 'And has he found a job yet?'

Here it was necessary to lie, Mrs. Wladek knew. One could not say that Rudi did not look for work. One had to say: 'Work is difficult to find. He tries, but there is no job.'

'And how about yourself?' the girl said.

'I am an old woman,' Mrs. Wladek said. 'Who would hire an old woman?'

The girl nodded. 'It's been a long time since your husband died,' she said.

'In an accident with an automobile,' Mrs. Wladek said. 'I remember that time. It is sad to think of.'

'And Rudi hasn't found any work in all that time,' the girl said.

'He looks hard,' Mrs. Wladek said earnestly. That was a game that had to be played, she knew, a conversation that started and finished each time she came for an appointment. 'He looks but work is difficult to find,' she said.

'I understand,' the girl said. 'But I'm sure you and Rudi will both find work soon.' She paused and her eyes closed.

Mrs. Wladek felt something happen.

It was . . . she felt . . . a stirring, a changing—

She stood up suddenly and the chair clattered, balanced and rocked back upright. 'What are you doing?'

'Doing?' the girl said.

'I go to look for work!' Mrs. Wladek said. 'You make me want to look for work!'

'That's fine, Mrs. Wladek,' the girl said. 'That's just fine.'

'But I want to look for work!' Mrs. Wladek said, horrified. 'What do you do to me?'

The girl only smiled.

Mrs. Wladek spun and ran for the door, her eyes wide; but she collided with a desk and backed off, and then managed to find her way. The door banged behind her.

Gloria sat at her desk smiling, filled with satisfaction. Of course, a reaction like Mrs. Wladek's was only to be expected, but when it was over she would be looking for work.

Gloria released the little doll she had held throughout the interview and let it fall back, out of sight, into her desk drawer. The doll was shaped into a vague female likeness.

She didn't need it now

Her work was done.

Mrs. Wladek was going to look for work, and that would adjust her to the world. She would be a functioning member of society now, it would do her a lot of good. Rudi, too—Gloria considered Rudi. There was another doll in the drawer, a male, and after a few seconds she put her hand in the drawer and fished around until she had found it.

She turned it slowly, feeling for the son, until at last she had made contact.

There.

He was talking with some friends; it would not be hard. She concentrated, and at the same time she heard him talking:

'So look, here's the way I see it. We got the Cobras on our necks, we got to get rid of them, right?'

Someone said: 'Right, Rudi.'

'So if we start a little rumble, very quiet so the cops don't figure what's going on, then we—'

A silence.

Someone said: 'What's wrong, Rudi?'

'I don't know. Something. What am I doing just standing here?'

And someone said: 'What do you mean?'

'I mean I ought to be out getting a job, man. Earning some bread for the old lady. Got to have money, got to have a job.'

Someone said: 'Hey, Rudi. Wait. What's the hurry?'

But Rudi had gone.

Gloria dropped the doll and closed the drawer, and sat back, smiling gently. It was wonderful to be able to help people.

It was just wonderful.

Find work. Find a job.

Go to the employment agency.

Start looking for work, right now.

Get a job.

It will be nice to have a steady job.

Nice—

Somehow, Mrs. Wladek fought off the voices in her mind. It was so easy to succumb to them and to drift into the terrible things they wanted. Mrs. Wladek did not want them at all.

A job, indeed!

But it took effort, all the same, to concentrate on herself instead of the work, the job, the employment agency. It took effort to sit down on a bench in the park, near the building where the case workers were, and plan out the next step.

A witch, certainly. The girl was a witch and she had put a hex on Mrs. Wladek and that hex had to be removed.

How?

Mrs. Wladek thought first of the old woman in the store.

Certainly a gypsy woman would be able to take off a hex. Mrs. Wladek remembered gypsies from the old country, laughing people with the strange gift, witches themselves but always available for a price—

The gypsy woman.

Mrs. Wladek stood up and began to walk toward the park's exit. She forced her legs to move, creaking, one step at a time, thinking to herself: *The gypsy woman, the gypsy woman, the gypsy woman*—and trying to ignore the voices in her head that went on and on:

It would be good to find a job.

*Go right away to the employment agency.
Right away—*

There were those who laughed — Marya Proderenska thought—and there would always be those who laughed, but that did not injure her; for scoffers she felt only a vast contempt. Had she not been shown in a dream that the power was hers? Had not each of her husbands, even the third who had contracted the fever and died with great suddenness in three weeks, admitted to her that she had a power beyond that of any normal woman? It was the power of vision and movement, the power of spell and incantation.

The others called it magic, though no gypsy would call it so.

Marya Proderenska sat quietly in the back room of the little shop and waited. A woman would come; she knew that, and the knowledge was another piece of her power, and a proof of it. Farther she could not see, but in the cloud of the future the woman was clear.

(What power Marya Proderenska had, a blonde social worker had, too, and other people; she had never been able to clear her mind of her superstitions enough to train the power or work very effectively with it. The power was sufficient for her.)

Marya Proderenska sighed. The power demanded its own responsibilities. She could not marry outside the clan into which she had been born. She could not be seen on certain days of every month. During those days many foods were forbidden her.

Thus the power worked, and thus she lived.

The woman would bring money to her. Mary knew. So she sat in the back of the shop and waited, and sighed, until the front door sighed open and Marie Wladek called: 'Old woman, old woman!'

'Do you call me?' Marya said in her proud baritone.

'I call you, I call the gypsy woman.'

Marya stood up and smoothed her old dress over the big-boned frame all of her husbands had admired. 'Then come to me,' she called.

Marie Wladek crept into the room, her eyes saucers of awe. To speak of witches was all very well, and a fresh-faced girl could give one fright; but here was the authority and power of witchcraft, in this woman with the fuzz of hair on her lip and the great trumpeting voice.

'I come for help,' Mrs. Wladek said.

'I know why you have come,' Marya Proderenska said. 'You have a great trouble.'

Mrs. Wladek nodded. 'I am bewitched. A witch has placed a hex upon me, and I come to you to remove it.'

There was a little silence. Then Marya Proderenska said: 'The powers will not do work without payment.'

Mrs. Wladek dug into her ancient beaded purse and found a crumpled dollar bill. She handed it over and the gypsy woman smiled and ducked her head.

'It is enough,' she said.

Mrs. Wladek said: 'Then you will help me?'

'I will help you,' the gypsy woman said. 'Tell me of this curse upon you.'

'There is a voice in my mind,' Mrs. Wladek said. 'The voice tells me—even now it continues—to go to an employment agency, to accept work . . . and the voice is not of my making.'

'Whose voice is this?' the gypsy woman said.

'It is my own voice,' Mrs. Wladek said. 'The voice is my own, but I did not tell it to speak. Inside my own head, I can hear my own voice as if someone else put it there.'

'Ah,' the gypsy woman said. 'And who is the witch who has put this curse upon you?'

Mrs. Wladek sighed. 'At the office of the social workers, there is one, a young woman. She has done this to me.'

Marya Proderenska nodded. Her eyes closed.

Mrs. Wladek stared at the still figure without moving for a minute. Time stretched endlessly. The room was very quiet; Mrs. Wladek heard the continuing voice in her mind and felt fear.

Another minute ticked by.

At last the gypsy woman opened her eyes. 'It is a strong curse,' she said in a distant voice. 'But I have erased it for you. I have taken the hex from you. Is it not so?'

'Taken the hex—' Mrs. Wladek shook her head. 'Then why do I still hear the voice?'

'You still hear it?' the gypsy woman muttered under her breath. 'Come back tomorrow. We work again.'

'Tomorrow is a long time.'

The gypsy woman closed her eyes for a second. 'All right,' she said, and snapped them open. 'Four o'clock this afternoon.'

'I will be here.'

'It is a strong curse.'

'You will help me,' Mrs. Wladek said.

'I will help you,' Marya Proderenska said.

But, after the old woman had left, Marva Proderenska sat alone and her face was troubled. The strength of the curse—she had

felt it herself—was enormous. She did not know of any magician who had such power.

She listed over the members of her own clan in her mind, and became satisfied that none she knew was responsible. And yet, the strength of the curse argued real power; was it possible that a power existed within the city, and she did not know of it? Marya felt a cold wind on her back, the wind of fear.

Such a power might do—anything.

And yet it was being used to coerce one useless old woman into taking a job!

Marya Proderenska lay flat on the floor, her arms outstretched. Thus one might gather the vital energies. Four o'clock was not many hours distant, and by four o'clock she would need all of the energy she could summon.

She did not allow herself to become doubtful about the outcome.

And yet she was afraid.

Gloria smiled understandingly at the woman who sat across the desk.

'I understand, Mrs. Francis,' she said.

'It's not that Tom's a bad boy, you know,' the woman said. 'But he's—easily led. That's the only thing.'

'Of course,' Gloria said. She looked at the middle-aged woman, wearing a grey suit that did not fit her overweight frame, and a silly little white hat. 'I'm sure everything's going to be all right,' she said.

Mrs. Francis gave a little gasp. 'Oh, I hope so,' she said. 'Tom doesn't mean to cause any trouble. He just doesn't understand—'

Gloria went over the report sheets mentally. Tom didn't mean to cause any trouble, but he had been involved in a gang war or two—nothing in the way of Thompson sub-machine guns, of course, or mortars. Just a few pistols and zip-guns and rocks and broken bottles.

Tom hadn't been killed yet. That was, Gloria thought sadly, only a matter of time. He hadn't killed anybody yet, either—but he'd come close. Tom had seen the inside of a jail or two a lot more recently than he'd seen the inside of a classroom.

Tom was easily led.

Sure.

Well, Gloria thought, the problem was to lead him into something more productive and satisfying than the gangs of New York. And that didn't seem to be too hard.

Of course, she had very little practice as yet. The theoretical

knowledge she'd been able to dig up in college was mostly on the magic and superstition shelves of the library—and, while she got full credit in her minor, Anthropology, for the research she'd done, a great deal of it just wasn't any practical help.

Not if you were a witch—or what passed for one.

'You see what I mean, don't you?' Mrs. Francis said.

'Of course I do,' Gloria said, and gave the woman her most reassuring smile. 'I'm sure something can be done. Do you know where your boy is now?'

Mrs. Francis nodded, birdlike. 'He's home now. I think he's sleeping. He usually doesn't wake up until after noon.'

'I see,' Gloria hesitated a moment. 'Can you describe him for me?'

'Describe him?'

'That's right,' Gloria said. 'You see, the somatotypes have, we've discovered, a great influence on mental and emotional makeup.'

She didn't feel right lying to the woman—but chances were that what she'd said didn't make any sense to Mrs. Francis and, in any case, Gloria could hardly tell her the real reason she wanted a description.

It would aid in making the doll she needed.

'He's about six feet tall,' Mrs. Francis said, 'but he's very thin, and sometimes I worry about that. I try to give him the best nourishment I know, but he—'

'What colour is his hair?' Gloria interrupted.

'Oh,' Mrs. Francis said. 'Brown. And brown eyes. Really nice eyes; they're his best feature; everybody says so.'

'Any distinguishing marks, or anything unusual about him?'

'He has a scar now, on his left arm just below the elbow, but he got that in a fight with these boys—'

'All right,' Gloria said. 'Thank you very much.'

'What are you going to do?' Mrs. Francis said. 'You're not going to have him arrested or anything, are you? Because he's not a bad boy, you know that. He's only—'

'Easily led,' Gloria finished. 'Of course. There won't be any need for arrest, or for anything so drastic as that. You just go home now, and don't worry. I'm sure everything's going to be all right.'

'I only want to help my boy,' Mrs. Francis said.

'Of course you do,' Gloria said. 'I want to help him, too.'

Mrs. Francis stood up and swallowed hard. 'I appreciate that,' she said.

'It's my job, that's all,' Gloria said, feeling unaccountably shy. As

the woman left she thought about that embarrassment and finally decided that she felt she had no right to be complimented. She was doing a job; it needed to be done; that was all.

True, she had special talents for the job—but Mrs. Francis didn't know that, and she hadn't made the talents anyhow, but been born with them.

Congratulations?

Don't be silly.

As a matter of fact, Gloria thought, she deserved a good talking-to. She hadn't had enough experience, and that was the simple truth. It was all very well to work on a boy like Rudi, or another one like Tom Francis, when they didn't have any idea who you were or even that you were trying to do something. That was easy.

But a woman like Mrs. Wladek—

She was suspicious from the start, and Gloria thought that perhaps she shouldn't have done anything. But it was obvious that the woman needed help to become a functioning member of society.

The only trouble was that Gloria hadn't been quite expert enough. Oh, given enough time, the command would work, and eventually become part of the personality. But, because Mrs. Wladek had been afraid and a little forewarned, she'd been able to fight off the command a little.

Practice, Gloria told herself, *makes perfect*. And it wasn't her fault that she couldn't do any better. Next time, she'd have a little more practice and she'd be able to do a clearer and more complete job.

And, in the meantime, there was no real harm done. Mrs. Wladek would come round, before long, and then everything would be all right.

Why, after all, there was Rudi, too. And Rudi undoubtedly had a job by now, or at least a good chance of one through an employment agency.

There was no reason to be depressed.

Her son was waiting for her when she arrived at her home once more. Mrs. Wladek looked at the boy with relief and some suspicion. It was not natural for Rudi to be at home during such an hour; he was out with his friends through the day, and this was good for a boy.

'Ma,' Rudi said, 'guess what?'

'You are in trouble,' Mrs. Wladek said at once, in a heavy voice.

'Trouble? I got no troubles, Ma,' Rudi said. He stood before her

in the dusty living-room, self-assured and proud, and it came to Mrs. Wladek all at once that her boy was a man.

'What is it?' she demanded. 'Tell me at once.'

'Sure I will, Ma,' Rudi said. 'I got a job. I start tomorrow. In an office, wrapping things. The mail room, they call it.'

Silence descended on the little room.

'Ma,' Rudi said at last. 'Ma, what's wrong?'

'Wrong?' Mrs. Wladek said. 'What should be wrong? Nothing at all is wrong. You have a job, very well, you have a job.'

'You're not happy about it, Ma?'

Mrs. Wladek gave a short bark. 'Happy? Indeed I should be happy? My son goes to work, like a dog, and I should be—' She paused and gasped suddenly. 'Why did you go to work?'

'You mean why did I get a job, Ma?' Rudi said. 'Listen, let's have supper and we'll talk about it, huh?'

'Supper?' Mrs. Wladek snorted. 'Supper we will have when I find out what I need to know. Not before.'

'But I'm hungry, Ma, and . . . oh, all right.' Rudi sat down on the old brown couch and sighed. 'I just thought it would be a good idea to get a job, bring some bread into the house, you know? So I went to the agency, and they had this application waiting, and I went down and got the job, and I start tomorrow. That's all. Now let's eat.'

'You got the idea to have a job?' Mrs. Wladek said. 'Fine. Fine. Just fine. And when did you get this idea?'

'I don't know,' Rudi said, and shrugged. 'Some time. This morning, maybe. Look, what difference does it make? I thought you'd like the idea, Ma. Some more dough coming in . . . you know.'

'This morning.' Mrs. Wladek raised clenched fists over her head. 'Cossacks!' she screamed. 'Monsters! Witches!'

Lunchtime.

Gloria looked up and smiled sweetly and distantly as Harold Meedy appeared at her desk. 'Got any special place to go?' he said.

'As a matter of fact—' she began, but he was too quick for her.

'It's always "as a matter of fact,"' he said. 'What's the matter—you got another boy friend or something? You don't like poor Harold? Look, Gloria, if you want to avoid me, then you go ahead and avoid me. But—'

'Its nothing like that,' Gloria said.

'So come on,' Harold said. 'Listen, I'm really a sweet guy when you get to know me. You'd like me. Sure you would.'

'I'm sure,' Gloria said. 'But I really do have something to take care of.'

'Can't you take care of it later?'

She shook her head.

'Well . . . all right, if you want me to grow up all frustrated.' He grinned at her and moved away.

When they were all gone, and only Mr. Fredericksohn remained in his private office, behind the closed door, Gloria opened a drawer of her desk and took out a piece of modelling clay a little bigger than her fist. Working without haste, and never bothering to look up she made a doll in the shape of a tall, thin boy.

The voodoo sects in Haiti used hair or fingernail parings from the subject, Gloria knew; she had learned that in her college research, but she had known about the doll long before. Hair and fingernail parings: what superstition! And it wasn't as if you really needed the doll; if necessary, you could get along very well without it. But it was a help; it made things easier; and why not?

She tried to picture Tom Francis. His mother's description of him had been pretty vague, but Gloria found she could locate him at his house; she turned the doll until she had the feeling of contact and then—

There.

It didn't take long, actually, not once you had your subject located. Tom hadn't really been a hard case; his juvenile delinquency, Gloria was quite sure, was a thing of the past. He'd be back in school as soon as the details could be worked out between Mrs. Francis and the Board of Education, and that would take care of that.

With a satisfied smile, she put the doll away in her drawer. She'd mash it back into clay later in the afternoon; that would enable her to use the same piece over and over again.

Clay cost money, and a case worker's salary wasn't large. Gloria could not see how she could put the cost of the clay down on a special requisition, anyhow; she had to pay for it herself, and so she was very careful and saving with it.

After she'd put the Tom doll away with the Rudi doll, making a mental note to take care of both of them before she left for the day, she fished out her beret and put it on and went out for a quick lunch.

It was just after two o'clock when Mr. Gerne came in. The others were used to his periodic arrivals, of course, and Gloria had never felt any fear of the director. He didn't work in the same

office, but elsewhere in the building, and once a week he made a habit of touring the various social-work agencies under his direction.

It kept the workers on their toes, Gloria imagined: the actual sight of the boss's boss would do that. Mr. Gerne never smiled; he was a small, thin-lipped man with white skin and very little hair. He stood in the outer office, peering round, for a few minutes, and then, nodding his head slowly, he went on and knocked at Mr. Fredericksohn's door.

'Who's there?' Mr. Frederickson called from inside.

'Mr. Gerne,' said Mr. Gerne. There was a little pause, and then Mr. Fredericksohn said:

'Ah. Come in.'

The door opened and shut and Mr. Gerne was invisible.

Gloria picked up a folder and pretended to concentrate on it. Of course, she could hear what was happening in the private office perfectly well. She remembered studying medieval witchcraft and thought suddenly of astral bodies.

But that had been a guess some distance from the truth.

The projection of the sense of hearing was such a simple thing really; why did people have to complicate it with all this talk about witches and the soul—she was reminded of Mrs. Wladek but put the woman out of her mind. Mr. Gerne was talking.

'... For instance, the new girl—what's her name?'

'Gloria Scott,' Mr. Fredericksohn's voice said. 'Yes?'

'What's she like?' Mr. Gerne's voice said. 'I don't know her personally—of course I've seen her there in the office, and she seems like a friendly, pretty girl. But you deal with her every day—'

'Very nice,' Mr. Fredericksohn said. 'Pleasant and easy to work with. A good type. Now, you take her record—'

'That's what I meant,' Mr. Gerne said. 'A record like that—it's just not possible. There isn't any chance she's faking it?'

After a little silence Mr. Fredericksohn said: 'No chance at all. I've had follow-ups on a random selection of her cases—standard practice for a newcomer. Of course, she doesn't know about any of that.'

'Of course. And?'

'No fakes,' Mr. Fredericksohn said. 'And don't tell me it's hard to believe. I know perfectly well it's hard to believe.'

'No returns,' Mr. Gerne said. 'Not a single return in over a month.'

'Except the old woman,' Mr. Fredericksohn said. 'Mrs. Wladek.'

Gloria turned a page in the report she was holding, without

taking her attention from the conversation in the private room.

It was always helpful to know the kind of thing people said about you, as well as what they thought. It gave you more facts to work with, and made you more efficient and better able to work at your chosen profession.

Mr. Gerne was saying: 'You can discount Mrs. Wladek. That one's a trouble-spot.'

'Always has been,' Mr. Fredericksohn said.

'All right, then discount her,' Mr Gerne said. 'Forget about her. And—outside of that one case—there hasn't been a repeat.'

'Some of the clients have died,' Mr. Fredericksohn said.

Mr. Gerne waited a second. Then he said: 'A little higher percentage than normal. So?'

'I mean, that's a reason for some of the non-repeats.'

'And the others?' Mr. Gerne paused a minute and then went on. 'You can't discount the girl's record like that.'

'I wasn't trying to,' Mr. Fredericksohn said mildly. 'I was only pointing out—'

'Let those go,' Mr. Gerne said. 'Obviously she had no control over that sort of thing. Unless you think she went out and killed them?'

'Of course not,' Mr. Fredericksohn said.

'And outside of that, then—no repeats. The girl's a wonder.'

'Certainly,' Mr. Fredericksohn said. 'Let's see how long it keeps up, that's all.'

Mr. Gerne said: 'Pessimist. All right, we'll drop the subject for now. Anyway, I did want to talk to you about the progress reports we've been getting from Frazier's office. It seems to me—'

Gloria broke the connection. Frazier, a supervisor from another office, didn't interest her; she only wanted to hear what the conversation about herself would be like. Well, now she knew.

And, thankfully, no one suspected a thing. Why, the subject had been brought up, right in the open, and dropped without a word or a thought.

'Unless you think she went out and killed them.'

Gloria didn't smile. The idea was not funny. Sometimes you had to do something like that—but the necessity didn't make it pleasant.

The trouble was that you couldn't always cure something by a simple projection into the mind. Sometimes you ran into a compulsion that was really deeply buried.

If the compulsion was a big one, and went back far into childhood, Gloria couldn't do anything directly about it. Sometimes it was possible to work around, and, of course, you did that when

you could. The important thing was society but you salvaged the individual wherever possible.

Where it wasn't possible—

Well, here's a man who has a compulsion to get drunk. And, when drunk, he's got to pick fights. Maybe he hasn't killed anybody in a fight yet—but some day he will. He's got the strength and, under the influence of sufficient alcohol, he's got no inhibitions about using it.

None.

You can let the man live, and by doing that kill an unknown number of other people. At the least, keeping your hands and your mind off the compulsive drink-fighter will serve to injure others—how many others, and how badly, you can't tell.

There are times when you've got to take an individual life in your hands.

And yet, because you can't always be sure—

Gloria's 'talents' could kill out of hand, she was sure. But she didn't use them that way. Instead, she simply projected a new compulsion into the mind of her subject.

The next time he got drunk and wanted to start a fight, he wanted to do something else, too.

For instance: walk along the edges of roofs.

The original compulsion had been added to, and turned into a compulsion toward suicide; that was what it amounted to.

Gloria didn't like doing it, and she was always glad when it wasn't necessary. But there was a dark side to everything—even, she thought, helping people.

She told herself grimly that it had to be done.

And then she returned to her work.

Mrs. Wladek pounded on the door of the gypsy's store a few minutes before four. Her face was white and her lips set in a thin line; she breathed with difficulty and with every move she made she could feel her old bones creak.

It was a shame what was being done to an old woman.

But did they care? Did any of them care?

Mrs. Wladek gave a little snort that was half laughter and half self-pity. She pounded on the door again and dropped her arm, feeling old and tired and nearly helpless.

But she had to fight on.

There was a limit to what an old woman could be expected to stand. They would learn, all of them, what—

The door opened.

Marya Proderenska said: 'Yes? You are early.'

'I am in a hurry. Terrible things have occurred.'

The gypsy woman sighed and stepped aside. 'Come in, then,' she said, and Mrs. Wladek entered slowly, peering round the front room.

'Come in the back,' the gypsy woman said. 'I have been preparing to help you. But more is required.'

It was Mrs. Wladek's turn to sigh. She reached into her purse and found a fifty-cent piece, which she handed over very slowly.

'More is required,' the gypsy woman said, looking at the coin in her hand as if, Mrs. Wladek thought, it was less than a penny. Did not the woman realize that fifty cents was a great deal of money for a poor old woman?

No one had any pity any more.

She handed over another fifty cents and the gypsy woman nodded sadly, pocketed the money and led the way to the back room.

'You will help me now?' Mrs. Wladek said.

'I will try.'

The room was silent as the gypsy woman brought all her knowledge and experience into play. Finally she looked at Mrs. Wladek and said: 'A very powerful curse has been put upon you. I can't help you.'

'The Church will help me!' Mrs. Wladek screamed. 'They have the power to exorcise—'

'Do not speak to me of churches,' the gypsy woman shouted.

Mrs. Wladek shook her head. 'You, who steal my money, who steal the bread from my old mouth without pity—'

'A woman must live,' Marya Proderenska said, with great dignity.

The housekeeper had said Father Seador was at supper. This did not make a difference. Mrs. Wladek's problem was certainly serious enough to interfere with any man's supper. Father Seador was overweight in any case; should he miss the entire meal it would not do him any harm. Marie Wladek had a problem, and a serious one; let him miss his supper. It was his job to help people.

But Father Seador would certainly not be in the best of moods.

He was not.

He arrived with his face set in firm lines of disapproval. Mrs. Wladek got up from her chair and curtsied toward him, being very careful of her old bones. He nodded. 'Rudi in trouble again?' he said at once, taking a chair.

Mrs. Wladek sat herself down slowly. When she was settled, she looked over at the middle-aged man. 'Rudi has a job.'

'A job? A job? Father Seador blinked. 'That's fine. That's certainly good news.'

'So you think,' Mrs. Wladek said crisply.

'Well, of course it's good news,' Father Seador said. 'Responsibility . . . steady income . . . Mrs. Wladek, I'm sure this has made you very happy, but if you'll pardon me,' Father Seador stood up, 'I'm in the middle of—'

'Wait,' Mrs. Wladek said. 'This is not what I have come to talk to you about. It is *why* he has taken a job. It is *why* I will be taking a job.'

'You?' Father Seador seemed incapable of speech. 'Well, I—'

'I am bewitched,' Mrs. Wladek said. 'A curse is upon me.'

'A curse? Well—' Father Seador stopped and cleared his throat. He sat down again. He blinked. At last he said: 'What's wrong, Mrs. Wladek?'

'I have told you,' she said. 'A curse. A curse. I want you to exorcise this witch that has put on me a hex.'

'Exorcise? Curse?' Father Seador coughed. 'I'm sure you must be mistaken, or—'

'Mistaken? I am not mistaken. I tell you there is a curse upon me.'

The parlour was very quiet for a long time. At last Father Seador said: 'If you really believe you've been hexed, you'd better give me all the details. When did you feel this . . . this curse put upon you?'

'This morning,' Mrs. Wladek said.

'And what kind of curse is this? I mean, what effect has it had?'

Mrs. Wladek's voice was as hard as iron. 'It has made my son take a job. It has made me want to look for a job. In time, I will not be able to fight the curse, and I will take a job. And then—'

'I don't see anything wrong about that,' Father Seador said mildly.

'You see nothing wrong in a poor old woman being forced to work? In a boy forced to grind out his youth among package-wrappers? You see nothing wrong in this?'

'Well, I . . . we all have to work.'

'Here?' Mrs. Wladek said with astonishment. 'Here in America, you believe that? It is not so. My own Uncle Bedrich has told me years ago it is not so. Do you dispute the word of my own Uncle Bedrich?'

'My good woman,' said Father Seador, 'Look around you . . . your friends, your neighbours—'

'Let us say no more about it,' Mrs. Wladek interrupted. 'There is a curse upon me and I have called on you to remove this curse.'

'How do you know this is a curse? Our minds do change, you know, and they do strange things—'

'I have been told,' Mrs. Wladek said.

'You've been told? By whom?'

Mrs. Wladek drew herself up in the chair. 'By Marya Proderenska, the gypsy fortune teller. She knows that—'

'A gypsy? You consulted a fortune teller?'

'I did.'

'Mrs. Wladek, do you know what you are saying . . . what you have done? Don't you realize you have committed a sin against—'

But he was speaking to empty air. Marie Wladek was gone.

Gloria looked up at the little clock and sighed briefly. Five o'clock. Another day gone already.

It was a shame, in a way, that time passed so quickly. Gloria didn't feel the least bit tired. After all, she had spent the day in helping people, and that was what made life worth while.

But it was quitting time. Staying late would give her the reputation of an eager beaver, and that would make her unpopular. Not that she cared for popularity for its own sake—certainly not!—but you couldn't do your best work unless the others in your office were willing to help you.

Leaving on time was a simple sacrifice to make for them.

She pulled open the desk drawer and got her beret. Then, as she was putting it on, she remembered.

In the other drawer were the clay models.

She opened the drawer and pulled them out. She had barely reduced them to a single amorphous lump when Mr. Fredericksohn passed her desk.

'What's that?' he said. 'Clay?'

'A nephew of mine,' Gloria said coolly. 'He likes to play with clay. I bought some and I'm taking it home.'

'Ah,' Mr. Fredericksohn said. 'Of course. Good night.'

And he was gone. Gloria put the clay back into the drawer and reached for her beret.

Harold Meedy called from across the room: 'Going home?'

'That's right,' she said.

'Can I charter a bus and drop you somewhere?'

'I'm afraid not,' she said. 'I've really got to get right home.'

'Listen,' Harold said. He came over to her desk. 'I've been trying to get somewhere with you ever since you walked into this office. Now, what's wrong with me? I haven't been able to get to first base. Don't you like me?'

'Mr. Meedy,' Gloria began, 'It's just that . . . well, I don't believe in inter-personal relations on that level, not in the office. I'm sorry.'

He blinked. 'You really believe that, don't you?'

'Of course I do,' she said.

'But—' He shrugged. 'O.K. O.K. I just wanted to know.'

The door closed behind him. Gloria felt a little relieved. If matters had gone on the way they'd threatened, why, she might have had to change Harold Meedy's mind for him. Not that it would have done him any harm, but . . . well, she just didn't like doing that sort of thing for purely personal reasons.

She was glad she hadn't had to tamper with him at all.

And now it was over, and she could forget about it. Humming under her breath, she put her beret on at last, and gave the stack of folders a pat to keep them absolutely neat, before she left the office.

She still felt a little sad about leaving on time, when there was so much work to be done. But tomorrow, she told herself, she would be able to get back to helping people. Tomorrow—

Tomorrow.

Ten minutes to nine, and Gloria put her beret away, reached for the first folder—and froze.

A second later the door opened. Gloria looked up and smiled helpfully. 'Mrs. Wladek,' she said. 'Is there anything I can do for you? This isn't your day for—'

'It is not my day,' Mrs. Wladek said. She closed the door behind her. 'This, I know. But I am here. Does this mean anything to you?'

Gloria forced her face to remain expressionless. 'Can I help you in any way?' she said. 'Is there anything I can do?'

'You?' Mrs. Wladek barked. 'You have done enough. I am not here to see you. But your supervisor, your boss—him, I will see.'

'My supervisor?' Gloria looked round. 'He isn't here yet.'

'He will be here later?'

'Of course he will,' Gloria said.

Mrs. Wladek sat down in a chair next to Gloria's desk. 'I will wait,' she announced. 'And you should know that there is nothing you can do to me now.' She reached into her bag and brought out a small wooden cross she had brought with her from the old country. She waved it at Gloria wildly.

'Do anything to you? What do you mean, Mrs. Wladek?'

'Hah,' Mrs. Wladek said. 'You need not pretend with me. This frightens you. No?'

Gloria blinked. 'I'm afraid not,' she said.

'But . . . you are trying to fool me,' Mrs. Wladek said. 'And I will not be fooled. I wait here for your boss, your supervisor.'

There was nothing else to do. 'All right,' Gloria said.

Everybody stared, of course, but none of the other workers came over to find out why Mrs. Wladek had come in on a day that wasn't her appointment day. With Mrs. Wladek right there asking questions just wasn't possible. Gloria tried to get some work done, but that wasn't possible either, and she resigned herself at last to sitting quietly and waiting for Mr. Fredericksohn's arrival.

She promised herself she'd make up for the loss of time by taking a shorter lunch hour, and that relieved her mind a little. But she did hope Mr. Fredericksohn would be early.

Thankfully, he was. At nine twenty-five exactly, the door opened and Mr. Fredericksohn entered. He glanced once round the office, saw Mrs. Wladek and went on. A second later he stopped.

He didn't have a chance to say anything. Mrs. Wladek was at his side. 'I must see you at once,' she said. 'I must see you alone, at once.'

He stared at her. 'Miss Scott here, I'm sure, can—'

'It is about Miss Scott that I want to talk to you,' Mrs. Wladek hissed.

Mr. Fredericksohn glanced at Gloria. She busied herself with papers. At last he said: 'Come with me,' and led Mrs. Wladek down the aisle into his private office. The door closed.

Ten minutes passed and the door opened. Mr. Fredericksohn's head projected. 'Miss Scott,' he said. 'May I see you for a minute?'

The curiosity in the office was almost a solid pressure, but Gloria paid it no attention. She said: 'Certainly,' put away the folder she had been consulting and went in.

There, at the side of Mr. Fredericksohn's desk, Mrs. Wladek was sitting, looking determined, grim and baffled all at once. Gloria stood in front of the desk and Mr. Fredericksohn seated himself behind it, the large open window at his back.

'Yes, Mr. Fredericksohn?' Gloria said.

'I have told him all,' Mrs. Wladek said. 'All. Everything. Total.'

'Er . . . yes,' Mr. Fredericksohn said. He faced Gloria resolutely. 'Mrs. Wladek has said something about a . . . about a spell. Do you know what she might be talking about? Something you said, some impression you gave her—'

'A spell?' Gloria shook her head. 'I can't think how she got the idea,' she said calmly.

'You do not fool him,' Mrs. Wladek said. 'He knows. I have told him all.'

'Certainly,' Mr. Fredericksohn murmured. 'But perhaps some little thing—'

'My report will be ready in an hour,' Gloria said. 'But I'm sure there was nothing.'

Mr. Fredericksohn coughed convulsively. 'I suppose not,' he said. 'I realize this is rather unpleasant for you—'

'I quite understand,' Gloria said.

Mrs. Wladek came out of her chair in a single movement and clutched Gloria by the left arm. 'What is happening?' she demanded.

Mr. Fredericksohn avoided her eye. 'Please sit down,' he said. And then, to Gloria: 'Miss Scott, if you'll make the call . . . you know what I mean?'

'Of course,' she said.

'The—' He whispered it: 'The hospital?'

'What did you say?' Mrs. Wladek demanded. 'What did you tell her?'

Gloria disengaged herself and went to the door. As she shut it behind her she could hear Mrs. Wladek's voice, rising to a crescendo of threats and abuse, and Mr. Fredericksohn's calm, scholarly attempts to stem the tide. She almost smiled.

Then she went to her own desk and picked up the telephone.

Actually, she told herself, matters had worked out for the best. Rudi had a job, and would grow into a fully functioning member of society. Mrs. Wladek would not be on the relief rolls any longer.

And what Mrs. Wladek wanted—a place to live, and someone to take care of her—would certainly be provided for her.

Yes, everything had worked out for the best. And, next time, she'd be able to handle a situation like Mrs. Wladek's with less trouble. Gloria looked into the future—into a long series of days and weeks, helping people, getting them to do what was best for them. Oh, sometimes they wouldn't like it right away, but you had to expect that. What was best for them—

Gloria smiled to herself quietly, and dialled a number.

On the second ring, a voice said: 'Bellevue Admitting.'

'We'd appreciate your sending an ambulance and attendants right away,' Gloria said. 'For the psychiatric wards.'

THE POSSESSED MAN

'His hair flaps and his body shudders. The hands clench on the shoulders of the man kneeling before him, and he mutters a fervent prayer.

The Reverend Christopher Neil-Smith is waging his ceaseless war against the Devil and all his works. A dozen or more times a week in his echoing Victorian church in Hampstead, London, this extraordinary vicar goes through his energetic and exhausting routine of exorcism.

If, during the ten-minute service in which he uses a mixture of holy water and prayer—commanding "evil spirits go back to your place and never return to trouble us again"—he looks like a man possessed, that's just what he is. For he claims that the forces of evil flow from his subject through him and waste themselves in the air.

"It can be dangerous at the time," he says, "I always feel pretty limp afterwards."

The Reverend Neil-Smith is one of a group of people—laymen included—who specialize in exorcism. He has been doing it for twenty years, he says, but has never been busier than now.

*The Daily Mirror,
February 1972*



Dr. Muncing, Exorcist

GORDON MACCREAGH

The brass plate on the gate post, of the trim white wicket said only: Dr. Muncing, Exorcist.

Aside from that, the house was just the same as all the others in that street—semi-detached, whitewashed, respectable. A few more brass plates announced other sober citizens with their sprinkling of doctors of medicine and one of divinity. But Dr. Muncing, Exorcist; that was suggestive of something quite different and strange.

The man who gazed reflectively out of the window at the driving rain, was, like his brass sign, vaguely suggestive, too, of something strange; of having the capacity to do something that the other sober citizens, doctors and lawyers, did not do.

He was of a little more than middle height, broad, with strong, capable-looking hands; his face was square cut, finely criss-crossed with weatherbeaten lines, tanned from much travel in far-away lands; a strong nose hung over a thin, wide mouth that closed with an extraordinary determination.

The face of a normal man of strong character. It was the eyes that conveyed that vague impression of something unusual. Deep set, they were, of an indeterminate colour, hidden beneath a frown of reflective brows; brooding eyes, suggestive of a knowledge of things that other sober citizens did not know.

The other man who stared out of the other window was younger, bigger in every way; an immense young fellow who carried in his big shoulders and clean complexion every mark of having devoted more of his college years to study of football rather than of medicine. This one grunted an ejaculation.

'I'll bet a dollar this is a patient for you.'

Dr. Muncing came over to the other window. 'I don't bet dollars with Dr. James Terry. Gambling seems to have been one

of the few things you did really well at Johns College. The fellow does look plentifully frightened, at that.' -

The man in question was hurrying down the street, looking anxiously at the house numbers; bent over, huddled in a raincoat, he read the numbers furtively, as though reluctant to turn his head out of the protection of his up-turned collar. He uttered a glad cry as he saw the plate of Dr. Muncing, Exorcist, and, letting the gate slam, he stumbled up the path to the door.

Dr Muncing met the man personally, led him to a comfortable chair, mixed a stimulant for him, offered him a cigarette. Calm, methodical, matter-of-fact, this was his 'bedside manner' with such cases. Forcefully he compelled the impression that, whatever might be the trouble, it was nothing that could not be cured. He stood waiting for an explanation. The man stammered an incoherent jumble of nothings.

'I—Doctor, I don't know how—I can't tell you what it is, but the Reverend Mr. Hendryx sent me to you. Yet I don't know what to tell you; there's nothing to describe.'

'Well,' said the doctor judicially, 'that is already interesting. If there's nothing and if the Reverend Mr. Hendryx feels that he can't pray it away, we probably have something that we can get hold of.'

His manner was dominant and cheerful, he radiated confidence. His bulky young assistant had been chosen for just that purpose also, to assist in putting over the impression of power, of force to deal with queer and horrible things that could not be sanely described.

The man began to respond to that atmosphere. He got a grip on himself and began to speak more coherently.

'Doctor, I don't know what to tell you. There have been no—spooks, or anything of that sort. We've seen nothing; heard nothing. It's only a feeling. I—you'll laugh at me, Doctor, but—it's just a something in the dark that brings a feeling of awful fear; and I know that it will catch me. Last night—my God, last night it almost touched me.'

'I never laugh,' said Dr. Muncing seriously, 'until I have laid my ghost. For some ghosts are horribly real. Tell me something about yourself, your family, your home and so on. And as to your fears, whatever they are, please don't try to conceal them from me.'

A baffled expression came over the man's face. 'There's nothing to tell, Doctor; nothing that's different to anybody else. I don't know what could bring this frightful thing about us. I—my name is Jarrett—I sell real estate up in the Catskills. I have a little place a hundred feet off the paved state road, two miles from the vil-

lage. There's nothing old or dilapidated about the house; there's modern plumbing, electric lights, and so on. No old graveyards anywhere in the neighbourhood. Not a single thing to bring this horror; and yet—I tell you, Doctor, there's something frightful in the dark that we can feel.'

'Hm-m!' The doctor pursed his lips and walked a short beat, his hands deep in his pockets. 'A new house; no old associations. Begins to sound like an elemental, only how would such a thing have gotten loose? Or it might be a malignant geoplasm, but—Tell me about your family, Mr. Jarrett.'

There's only four of us, Doctor. There's my wife's brother, who's an invalid; and . . .

'Ah-h!' A quick breath came from the doctor. 'So there's a sick man, yes? What is his trouble?'

'His lungs are affected. He was advised to come to us for the mountain air; and he was getting very much better; but recently he's very much worse again. We've been thinking that perhaps this constant terror has been too much for him.'

'Hm-m, yes, indeed.' The doctor strode his quick beat back and forth; his indeterminate eyes were distinctly steel grey just now. 'Yes, yes, the terror, and the sick man who grows worse. Quite so. Who else, Mr. Jarrett? What else have you that might attract a visophaging entity?'

'A viso-what? Good God, Doctor, we haven't anything to attract anything. Besides my wife's brother there's only my son, ten years of age, and my wife. She gets it worse than any of us; she says she has even seen—but I think there's a lot of blarney in all that.' The man contrived a sick smile. 'You know how women are, Doctor; she says she has seen shapes—formless things in the dark. She likes to think she is psychic, and she is always seeing things that nobody else knows anything about.'

'Oh, good Lord!' Dr. Muncing groaned and his face was serious. 'Verily do fools rush in. All the requirements for piercing the veil. Heavens, what idiots people can be.'

Suddenly he shot an accusing finger at Mr. Jarrett. 'I suppose she makes you sit round table with her, and all that sort of stuff.'

'Yes, Doctor, she does. Raps and spelt-out messages, and so on.'

'Good Lord!' The doctor walked angrily back and forth. 'Fools by the silly thousand play with this kind of fire, and this time these poor simpletons have broken in on something.'

He whirled on the frightened relator with accusing finger, laying down the law.

'Mr. Jarrett, your foolish wife doesn't know what she has done. I myself don't know what she has turned loose or what

this thing might develop into. We may be able to stop it. It may escape and grow into a world menace. I tell you we humans don't begin to know what forces exist on the other side of that thin dividing line that we don't begin to understand. The only thing to do now is to come with you immediately to your home; and we must try and find out what this thing is that has broken through and whether we can stop it.'

The Jarrett house turned out exactly as described. Modern and commonplace in every way; situated in an acre of garden and shrubbery on a sunlit slope of the Catskill Mountains. The other houses of the straggly little village were much the same, quiet residences of normal people who preferred to retire a little beyond the noise and activity of the summer resort of Pine Bend about two miles down the state road.

The Jarrett family fitted exactly into their locale. Well meaning, hospitable rural non-entities. The lady who was psychic was over-plump and short of breath at that elevation; the son, a gangling schoolboy, evinced the shy aloofness of a country youth before strangers; the sick man, thin and drawn, with an irritable cough, showed the unnatural flush of colour on his cheeks that marked his disease.

It required very much less than Dr. Muncing's keenness to see that all of these people were in a condition of nervous tension that in itself was proof of something that had made quite an extraordinary effect on their unimaginative minds.

Dilated eyes, tremulous limbs, backward looks; all these things showed that something had brought this unfortunate family to the verge of a panic that reached the very limits of their control.

The doctor was an adept at dispelling that sort of jumpiness. Such a mental condition was the worst possible for combating 'influences,' whatever they might be. He acknowledged his introductions with easy confidence, and then he held up his hand.

'No, no, nix on that. Give me a chance to breathe. D'you want to ruin my appetite with horrors? Let's eat first and then you can spread yourselves out on the story. No ghost likes a full stomach.'

He was purposely slangy. The immediate effect was that his hosts experienced a measure of relief. The man radiated such an impression of knowledge, of confidence, of power.

The meal, however, was at best a lugubrious one. Conversation had to be forced to dwell on ordinary subjects. The wife evinced a painful disinclination to go into the kitchen. 'Our cook left us two days ago,' she explained. The boy was silent and frightened.

The sick man said little, and coughed a dry, petulant bark at intervals.

The doctor, engrossed in his plate, chattered gaily about nothing; but all the time he was watching the invalid like a hawk. James Terry did his best to distract attention from the expert's scrutiny of everybody and everything in the room. By the time the meal was over the doctor had formed his opinion about the various characteristics and idiosyncrasies of his hosts, and he dominated the company with his expansive cheerfulness.

'Well, now, let's get one of those satisfying smokes in the jimmy pipe, and you can tell me all about it. You—selecting the lady—you tell me. I'm sure you'll give the best account.'

The lady, flustered and frightened, was able to add very little to what her husband had already described. There was nothing to add. A baffling nothingness enshrouded the whole situation; but it was a nothingness that was full of an unnamable fear—a feeling of terror enhanced by the 'shapes' of the wife's psychic imaginings. A nameless nothing to be combated.

The doctor shrugged with impatience. He had met with just such conditions before: the inability of people to describe their ghostly happenings with coherence. He decided on a bold experiment.

'My dear lady,' he said, devoting his attention to the psychic one, 'it is difficult to exorcise a mere feeling until we know something about the cause of it. Now I'll tell you what we ought to do. When you sit at your table for your little seances you get raps and so on, don't you? And you spell out messages from your "spirit friends," isn't it? And you'd like to go into a trance and let your "guides" control you; only you are a little nervous about it; and all that kind of stuff, no?'

'Why, yes, Doctor, that is just about what happens, but how should you know all that?'

'Hm,' grunted the doctor dryly. 'You are not alone in your foolishness, my dear lady; there are many thousands in the United States who take similar chances. They look upon psychic exploration as a parlour game. But now what I want to suggest is, let's have one of your little seances now. And you will go into a trance this time and perhaps you—I mean your guides—will tell us something. In the trance condition, which after all is a form of hypnosis—though we do not know whether the state is auto-induced or whether it is due to the suggestion of an outside influence—in this hypnotic condition the subconscious reflexes are sensitive to influences that the more material conscious mind cannot receive.'

Mrs. Jarrett's plump hand fluttered to her breast. This was so sudden; and she had really been a little bit afraid of her seances since this terror came into the house. But the doctor was already arranging the little round table and the chairs.

Without looking round, he said, 'You need not be at all nervous this time. And I want your brother particularly to stay in the room, though not necessarily at the table. Jimmy, you sit aside and steno whatever comes through, will you.' And in a quiet aside to his friend, he added, 'Sit near the switch, and if I holler, throw on the lights instantly and see that the sick man gets a stimulant. I may be busy.'

Under the doctor's experienced direction everything was soon ready. Just the four sat at the table, the Jarrett family and the doctor. The sick brother sat tucked in an armchair by the window and Jimmy Terry near the light switch at the door.

Once more the doctor cautioned the brawny Terry, 'Watch this carefully, Jimmy. I'm putting the sick man's life into your hands. If you feel anything, if you sense anything, if you *think* anything near him, snap on the lights. Don't ask anything. Act. Ready? All right then, black out.'

With the click of the switch the room was in darkness through which came only the petulant cough of the sick man. As the eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom there was sufficient glow from the moonlight outside to distinguish the dim outlines of figures.

'This is what you usually do, isn't it?' asked the doctor. 'Hands on the table and little fingers touching?' And without waiting for the reply of which he seemed to be so sure, he continued, 'All the usual stuff, I see. But now, Mrs. Jarrett, I'm going to lay my hands over yours and you will go into a trance. So. Quiet and easy now. Let yourself go.'

In a surprisingly short space of time the table shivered with that peculiar inward tremor so familiar to all dabblers in the psychic. Shortly thereafter it heaved slowly up and descended with a vast deliberation. There was a moment's stillness fraught with effort; then a rhythmic tap-tap of one leg.

'Now,' said the doctor authoritatively. 'You will go into a trance, Mrs. Jarrett. Softly, easily. Let go. You're going into a trance. Going . . . going . . .' His voice was soothingly commanding.

Mrs. Jarrett moaned, her limbs jerked, she stretched as if in pain; then with a sigh she became inert.

'Watch out, Jimmy,' the doctor warned in a low voice. Then to the woman: 'Speak. Where are you? What do you see?'

The plump, limp bulk moaned again. The lips moved; inarticulate sounds proceeded from them, the fragments of unformed words; then a quivering sigh and silence. The doctor took occasion to lean first to one side and then to the other to listen to the breathing of Mr. Jarrett and the boy. Both were a little faster than normal; under the circumstances, not strange. With startling suddenness words cut the dark, clear and strong.

'I am in a place full of mist, I don't know where. Grey mist.' A laboured silence. Then: 'I am at the edge of something; something deep, dark.' A pause. 'Before me is a curtain, dim and misty—no—it seems—I think—no, it is the mist that is the curtain. There are dim things moving beyond the curtain.'

'Ha!' An exclamation of satisfaction from the doctor.

'I can't make them out. They are not animals; not people. They are dark things. Just—shapes.'

'Good God, that's what she said before!' The awed gasp was Mr. Jarrett's.

The sick man coughed gratingly.

'The shapes move, they twine and roll and swell up. They bulge up against the curtain as if to push through. It is dark; too dark on that side to see. I am afraid if one might push through . . .'

Suddenly the boy whimpered, 'I don't like this. It's cold, an' I'm scared.'

The doctor could hear the hard breathing of Mr. Jarrett on his left as the table trembled under his sudden shiver. The doctor himself experienced an enveloping depression, an almost physical crawling of the cold hairs up and down his spine. The sick man went into a spasm of violent coughing.

Suddenly the voice screamed, 'One of the shapes is almost—my God, it is through! It's on this side. I can see—oh God, save me.'

'Lights, Jimmy!' snapped the doctor. 'Look to the sick man.'

The swift flood of illumination showed Mr. Jarrett grey and beaded with perspiration; the boy in wild-eyed terror; Terry, too, big-eyed, and nervously alert. All of them had felt a sudden stifling weight of a clutching fear that seemed to hang like a destroying wave about to break.

The sick man was in paroxysm of coughing from which he passed into a swoon of exhaustion. Only the woman had remained blissfully unconscious. The voice that had spoken out of her left her untroubled. In heavy peacefulness she slumped in her trance condition.

The doctor leaped round the table to her and placed his hands over her forehead in protection from he did not know exactly what. A chill still pervaded the room; a physical sense of cold

and lifting of hair. Some enormous material menace had almost been able to swoop upon a victim. Slowly, with the flashing on of the lights, the horror faded.

The doctor bent over the unconscious lady. Smoothly he began to stroke her face, away from the centre towards her temples. As he stroked he talked, softly, reassuringly.

Presently the woman shuddered, heaved ponderously. Her eyes opened blankly, without comprehension. Wonder dawned in them at the confusion.

'I must have been asleep,' she murmured; and she was able to smile sheepishly. 'Tell me, did I—did my guides speak?'

That foolish, innocent question, coming from the only one in the room who knew nothing of what had happened, served to dissipate fear more than all the doctor's reassurances. The others began to take hold of themselves. The doctor was able to turn his attention to the sick man.

'How is his pulse, Jimmy? Hm-m, weak, but still going. He's just exhausted. That thing drew an awful lot of strength out of him. It nearly slipped one over on me; I didn't think it was through into this side yet.'

To his hosts he said with impressive gravity, 'It is necessary to tell you that we are faced with a situation that is more dangerous than I had thought. There is in this thing a distinct physical danger; it has gone beyond imagination and beyond "sensing" things. We are up against a malignant entity that is capable of human contacts. We must get the patient up to bed and then I shall try to explain what this danger is.'

He took the limp form in his arms with hardly an effort and signified to Mrs. Jarrett to lead the way. To all appearances it was no more than an unusually vigorous physician putting a patient to bed. But the doctor made one or two quite extraordinary innovations.

'Fresh air to the contrary,' he said grimly. 'Windows must remain shut and bolted. Let me see: iron catches are good. And, Johnny, you just run down to the kitchen and bring me up a fire iron—a poker, tongs, anything. A stove lid lifter will do.'

The boy clung to the close edges of the group. The doctor nodded with understanding.

'Mr. Jarrett, will you go? We mustn't leave our patient until we have him properly protected.'

In a few moments Mr. Jarrett returned with a plain iron kitchen poker. That was just the thing, the doctor said. He placed it on the floor close along the door jamb. He herded the others out and, coming last himself, shut the door, pausing just a moment to note

that the lock was of iron, after which he followed the wondering family down to the living-room. They sat expectant, uneasy.

'Now,' the doctor began, as though delivering a lecture. 'I want you all to listen carefully, because—I must tell you this, much as I dislike to frighten you—this thing has gone so far that a single mis-step may mean a death.'

He held up his hand. 'No, don't interrupt. I'm going to try to make clear what is difficult enough anyhow; and you must all try to understand it because an error now—even a little foolishness, a moment of forgetfulness—can open the way for a tragedy; because—now let me impress you with this—the thing that you have felt is a palpable force. I can tell you what it is, but I cannot tell you how it came to break into this side. This malignant force is'—he paused to weigh his words—'an elemental. I do not know how the thing was released. Maybe you had nothing to do with it. But you, madam—to the trembling Mrs. Jarrett—you caused it by playing with this seance business, about the dangers of which you know nothing. Nor have you taken the trouble even to read up on the subject. You have opened the way to attract this thing to your house; you and the unfortunate, innocent sick man upstairs. You've actually invited it to live among you.'

The faces of the audience expressed only fear of the unknown; fear and a blank lack of understanding. The doctor controlled his impatience and continued his lecture.

'I can't go into the complete theory of occultism here and now; but this much you must understand,' he said, pounding his fist on his knee for emphasis; 'It is an indubitable fact, known throughout the ages of human existence, and re-established by modern research, that there exist certain vast discarnate forces alongside of us and all around us. These forces function according to certain controlling laws, just as we do. They probably know as little about our laws as we do about theirs.'

'There are many kinds of these forces. Forces of a high intelligence, far superior to ours; forces of possibly less intelligence; benevolent forces; malignant ones. They are all loosely generalized as spirits: elementals, subliminals, earthbounds and so on.'

'These forces are separated from us, prevented from contact, by—what shall I say? I dislike the word, evil, or curtain; or, as the Bible puts it, the great gulf. They mean nothing. The best simile is perhaps in the modern invention of the radio.'

'A certain set of wavelengths, ethereal vibrations, can impinge themselves upon a corresponding instrument attuned to those vibrations. A slight variation in wavelength, and the receiving instrument is a blank, totally unaffected, though it knows that vi-

brations of tremendous power exist all around it. It must tune in to become receptive to another set of vibrations.

'In something after this manner these discarnate so-called spirit forces are prevented from impinging themselves upon our consciousness. Sometimes we humans, for reasons of which we are very often unaware, do something, create a condition, which tunes us in with the vibration of a certain group of discarnate forces. Then we become conscious; we establish contact; we, in common parlance, see a ghost.'

The lecturer paused. Vague understanding was apparent on the faces of his fascinated audience.

'Good! Now then—I mentioned elementals. Elementals comprise one of these groups of discarnate forces; possibly the lowest of the group and the least intelligent. They have not evolved to human, or even animal form. They are just—shapes.'

'Oh, my God!' the shuddering moan came from Mrs. Jarrett. 'The shapes that I have sensed!'

'Exactly. You have sensed such a shape. Why have you sensed it? Because somehow, somewhere, something has happened that has enabled one of these elemental entities to tune in on the vibrations of our human wavelength, to break through the veil. What was the cause or how, we have no means of knowing. What we do know about elementals, as has been fully recognized by occultists of the past ages and has been pooh-poohed only by modern materialism, is that they are, to begin with, malignant; that is, hostile to human life. Then again—now mark this well—they can manifest themselves materially to humans only by drawing the necessary force from a human source, preferably from some human in a state of low resistance; from—a sick man.'

'Oh, my—my brother?' Mrs. Jarrett gasped her realization.

The doctor nodded slowly.

'Yes, his condition of low resistance and your thoughtless reaching for a contact in your seances have invited this malignant entity to this house. That is why the sick man has taken this sudden turn for the worse. The elemental is sapping his vitality in order to manifest itself materially. So far you have only felt its malevolent presence. Should it succeed in drawing to itself sufficient force it might be capable of enormous and destructive power. No, no, don't scream now; that doesn't help. You must all get a grip on yourselves so as calmly to take the proper defensive precautions.'

'Fortunately we know an antidote; or let me say rather, a deterrent. Like most occult lore, this deterrent has been known and used by all peoples even up to this age of modern scepticism.'

Savage people throughout the world use it; oriental peoples with a sensitivity keener than our own use it; modern white people use it, though unconsciously. The literature of magic is full of it.

It is nothing more or less than iron. Cold iron. The iron nose-ring or toe-ring of the savage; the mantra loha of the Hindoos; the lucky horseshoe of your rural neighbours today. These things are not ornaments; they are amulets.

'We do not know why cold iron should act as a deterrent to certain kinds of hostile forces—call them spirits, if you like. But it is a fact known of old that a powerful antipathy exists between cold iron and certain of the lower orders of inhuman entities: doppelgangers, churels, incubi, wood runners, leperlings, and so on, and including all forms of elementals.

'So powerful is this antipathy that these hostile entities cannot approach a person or pass a passage so guarded. There are other forms of deterrents against some of the other discarnate entities: pentagons, Druid circles, etc., and even the holy water of the Church. Don't ask me why or how—perhaps it has something to do with molecular vibrations. Let us be glad, for the present, that we know of this deterrent. And let each of you go to bed now with a poker or a stove lid or whatever you fancy as an amulet, which I assure you will be ample to protect a normal healthy person who does not contrive to establish some special line of contact which may counteract the deterrent. In the case of the sick man I have taken the extra precaution of guarding even the door.

'Now the rest of you go to bed and *stay in your rooms*. If you're nervous, you may sleep all in one room. Dr. Terry and I will sit up and prowling around a bit. If you hear a noise it will be us doing night watchman. You can sleep in perfect security, unless you commit some piece of astounding foolishness which will open an unguarded avenue of contact. And one more thing: warn your brother, even if he should feel well enough, not in any circumstances to leave his room. Good night; and sleep well—if you can.'

Hesitant and unwilling the family went upstairs; huddled together, fearful of every new sound, every old shadow, not knowing how this horror that had come into the house might manifest itself; hating to go, but worn out by fatigue engendered of extreme terror.

'I'll bet they sleep all in one room like sardines,' commented the doctor.

Terry caught the note of anxiety and asked, 'Was that all the straight dope? I mean about elementals and so on? And iron? Sounds kind of foolish.'

The doctor's face was sober, the irises of his indeterminate eyes so pale that they were almost invisible in the artificial light.

'You never listened to a less foolish thing, my boy. It sounds so to you only because you have been bred in the school of modern materialism. What? Is it reasonable to maintain that we have during the last thin fringe of years on humanity's history obliterated what has been known to humanity ever since the first anthropoid hid his head under his hairy arms in terror? We have but pushed these things a little farther away; we have become less sensitive than our forefathers. And, having become less sensitive, we naturally do not inadvertently tune in on any other set of vibrations; and so we proclaim loudly that no such things exist. But we are beginning to learn again; and if you have followed the trend you will surely have noticed that many of our leading men of science, of thought, of letters, have admitted their belief in things which science and religion have tried to deny.'

Terry was impressed with the truth of his friend's statement. The possibilities thus opened up made him uneasy.

'Well, er-er, this—this elemental thing,' he said uneasily, 'can it do anything?'

'It can do'—the indeterminate eyes were far-away pin-points—'it can do anything, everything. Having once broken into our sphere, our plane, our wavelength—call it what you will—its malignant potentiality is measured only by the amount of force it can draw from its human source of supply. And remember—here is the danger of these things—the measure is not on a par ratio. It doesn't mean that such a malignant entity, drawing a few ounces of energy from a sick man, can exert only those few ounces. In some manner which we do not understand, all the discarnate intelligences know how to step-up an almost infinitesimal amount of human energy to many hundreds percent of power; as for instance the "spirits" that move heavy tables, perform levitation and so on. A malignant spirit can use that power as a deadly, destructive force.'

'But, good Lord,' burst out Terry, 'Why should the thing be malignant? Why, if it has broken through, got into tune with human vibrations, why should it want to destroy humans who have never done it any harm?'

The doctor did not reply at once. He was listening, alert and taut.

'Do these people keep a dog, do you know, Jimmy? Would that be it snuffling outside the door?'

But the noise, if there had been any, had ceased. The silence was sepulchral. The doctor relaxed and took up the last question.

'Why should it want to destroy life? That's something of a poser. I might say, how do I know? But I have a theory. Remember I said that elementals belonged to one of the least intelligent groups of discarnate entities. Now, the lower one goes in the scale of human intelligence, the more prevalent does one find the superstition that by killing one's enemy one acquires the good qualities of that enemy, his strength or his valour or his speed or something. In the lowest scale we find cannibalism, which is, as so many leading ethnologists have demonstrated, not a taste for human flesh, but a ceremony, a ritual whereby the eater absorbs the strength of the victim. And I suppose you know, incidentally, that militant modern atheists maintain that the holy communion is no other than a symbol of that very prevalent idea. An unintelligent elemental, then . . .'

The doctor suddenly gripped his friend's arm. A creak had sounded on the stairs. In the tense silence both men fancied they could detect a soft, sliding scuffle in that direction. With uncontrollable horror Terry's heart came up to his throat. In one panther bound the doctor reached the door and tore it open. Then he swore in baffled irritation.

Through the open door Terry could hear distinctly scurrying steps on the first landing. In sudden surge of horror at being left alone he leaped from his chair to follow his friend, and bumped into him at the door.

Dr. Muncing, cursing his luck in a most plebian manner, noted his expression and became immediately the scientist again.

'What's this, what's this? This won't do. Scare leaves you vulnerable. Now let me psychoanalyze you and eliminate that. Sit down and get this; it's quite simple and quite necessary before we start out chasing this thing. You feel afraid for two reasons. The first is psychological. Our forebears knew that certain aspects of the supernatural were genuinely fearsome. Unable to differentiate the superstition grew amongst the laity that all aspects were to be feared, just as most people fear all snakes, though only six per cent of them are poisonous. You have inherited both fear and superstition. Secondly, in this particular case, you sense the hostility of this thing and its potential power for destruction. Therefore, you are afraid.'

Under the doctor's cold logic, his friend was able to regain at least a grip on his emotions. With a smile he said, 'That's pretty thin comfort when even you admit its power for destruction.'

'Potential, I said. Don't forget, potential,' urged the doctor. 'It's power is capable of becoming enormous. Up to the present it has not been able to absorb very much energy. It evaded us just now

instead of attacking us, and we have shut off its source of supply. Remember, too, its manifestation of itself must be physical. It may claw your hair in the dark; perhaps push you over the banisters if it gets a chance; but it can't sear your brain and blast your soul. It has drawn to itself sufficient physical energy to make itself heard; that means to be felt, and possibly to be seen. It has materialized; it cannot suddenly fade through walls and doors.'

'To be seen?' said Terry in awe-struck tones. 'Good gosh, what does a tangible hate look like?'

The doctor nodded. 'Well put, Jimmy; very well expressed. A tangible hate is just what this thing is. And since it is inherently a formless entity, a shape in the dark, manifesting itself by drawing upon human energy, it will probably look like some gross distortion of human form. Just malignant eyes, maybe, or clutching hands; or perhaps something more complete. Its object will be to skulk about the house seeking for an opening to absorb more energy to itself. Ours must be to rout it out.'

Mentally Terry was convinced. He could not fail to be, after that lucid exposition of exactly what they were up against. But physically the fine hair still rose on his spine. Shapeless things that could hate and could lurk in dark corners to trip one up on the stairs were sufficient reason for the very acme of human fear. However, he stood up. 'I'm with you,' he said shortly. 'Go ahead.'

The doctor held out his hand. 'Stout fellow. I knew you would, of course; and I brought this along for you as being quite the best weapon for this sort of a job. A blackjack in hand is a strong psychological bracer, and it has the virtue of being iron.'

Terry took the weighty little thing with a feeling of vast security, which was instantly dispelled by the doctor's next words.

'I suppose,' said Terry, 'That on account of the iron the thing can't approach one.'

'Don't fool yourself,' said the other. 'Iron is a deterrent. Not an absolute talisman in every case. We are going after this thing; we are *inviting* contact. Just as a savage dog may attack a man who is going after it with a club, so our desperate elemental, if it sees a chance, may—well, I don't know what it can do yet. Stick close, that's all.'

Together the two men went up the stairs and stood in the upper hall. Four bedrooms and a bathroom opened off this. Two of the rooms they knew to be occupied. The other doors stood similarly closed.

'We've got to try the rooms,' the doctor whispered. 'It probably can, if necessary, open an unlocked door, though I doubt whether it would turn an iron key.'

Firmly, without hesitation, he opened one of the doors and stepped into the room. The doctor switched on the light. Nothing was to be seen, nothing heard, nothing felt.

'We'd sense it if it were here,' said the doctor as coolly as though hunting for nothing more tangible than an odour of escaping gas. 'It must be in the other empty room. Come on.'

He threw the door of that room wide open and stood, shoulder-to-shoulder with Terry, on the threshold. But there was nothing; no sound; no sensation.

'Queer,' muttered the doctor. 'It came up the stairs. It would hardly go into the bathroom, with an iron tub in it—though God knows, maybe cast iron molecules don't repel like hand-wrought metal.'

The bathroom drew blank. The two men looked at each other, and now Terry was able to grin. This matter of hunting for a presence that evaded them was not nearly so fearsome as his imagination had conjured up. The doctor's eyes narrowed to slits as he stood in thought.

'Another example,' he murmured, 'of the many truths in the Bible about the occult. Face the devil and he will fly from you, eh? I wonder where the devil this devil can be?'

As though in immediate answer came the rasping sounds of a dry grating cough.

Instinctively both men's heads flew round to face the sick man's door. But that remained undisturbed; the patient seemed to be sleeping soundly. Suddenly the doctor gripped his friend's arm and pointed—up to the ceiling.

'From the attic. See that trapdoor. It has taken on the cough with the vital energy it has been drawing from the sick man. I guess there'll be no lights up there. I'll go and get my flashlight. You stay here and guard the stairs. Then you can give me a boost up.'

The doctor was becoming more incredible every minute.

'You mean to say you propose to stick your head up through there?'

The doctor nodded soberly; his eyes were now black beads.

'It's quite necessary. You see, we've got to chase this thing out of the house while it is still weak, and then protect all entrances. Then, if it cannot quickly establish a contact with some other sick and non-resistant source of energy, it must go back to where it came from. Without a constant replenishment of human energy it can't keep up the human vibrations. That's the importance of shutting it out while it is still too weak to break through anybody else's resistance somewhere else. It's quite simple, isn't it? You sit

tight and play cat over the mouse hole. I'll be right up again.'

Cat-like himself, the doctor ran down the steps. Terry felt chilled despite the fact that the hall was well lighted and he was armed. But that black square up there—if any cover belonged over it, it had been removed. The hole gaped dark, forbidding; and somewhere beyond it in the misty gloom a formless thing coughed consumptively. Terry, gazing at the hole in fascinated terror, imagined for himself a sudden framing of baleful eyes, a reaching down of a long taloned claw.

It grew to a horror, staring at that black opening, as into an evil world beyond. The effort of concentration became intolerable. Terry felt that he could not for the life of him hold his stare; he had to relieve himself of that tension or he would scream. He felt that cry welling up in his throat and the chill rising of hair on his scalp. He let his eyes drop and took a long breath to recover the control that was slipping from him.

There came a sharp click from the direction of the electric switch, and the hall was in sudden blackness.

Terry stood frozen, the cry choked in his throat. He could not tell how long he remained transfixed. An age passed in motionless fear of he did not know what. What had turned off the lights?

In the blackness a board creaked with awful deliberation. Terry could not tell where. His faculties refused to register. Only his wretched imagination—or was it his imagination?—conjured up a shadow, darker than the dark, poised on one grotesque foot like some monstrous misshapen carrion bird, watching him with a fell intentness. His pulse hammered at his temples for what seemed an eternity of horror. He computed time later by the fact that his eyes were becoming accustomed to the dim glow that came from the light downstairs.

Another board creaked, and now Terry felt his knees growing limp. But that was the doctor's firm step on the lower stairs. Terry's knees stiffened and he began to be able to breathe once more.

The shadow seemed to know that Dr. Muncing was returning, too. Terry was aware of a rush, of a dimly monstrous density of blackness that launched itself at him. He was hurled numbingly against the wall by a muffling air-cushion sort of impact. Helplessly dazed, smothered, he did not know how to resist, to defend himself. He was lost. And then the glutinous pressure recoiled, foiled. He could almost hear the baffled hate that withdrew from him and hurtled down the stairs.

His senses registered the fact that without his own volition he shouted, 'Look out!' and that there was a commotion somewhere

below. He heard a stamping of feet and a surge of wind as though a window had been blasted open; and the next thing was the doctor's inquiry, 'Are you hurt?' and the beam of a flashlight racing up the steps.

He was not hurt; miraculously, it seemed to him, for the annihilating malevolence of that formless creature had appeared to be a vast force. But the doctor dressed him down severely.

'You lost your nerve, in spite of all that I explained to you. You let it influence your mind to fear and so played right into its hands. You laid yourself open to attack as smoothly as though you were Mrs. Jarrett herself. But out of that very evil we can draw the good of exemplary proof.

'You were helpless; paralyzed. And yet the thing drew off. Why? Because you had your iron blackjack in your hand. If it had known you had that defence it would never have attacked you, or it would have influenced you to put the iron down first. Knowing now that you have it, it will not, in its present condition of weakness, attack you again. So stick that in your hat and don't get panicky again. But we've got to keep after it. If we can keep it out of the house; if we can continue so to guard the sick man that the thing cannot draw any further energy from him its power to manifest itself must dwindle. We shall starve it out. And the more we can starve it, the less power will it have to break through the resistance of a new victim.

'Come on, then,' said Terry.

'Good man,' approved the doctor. 'Come ahead. It went through the living-room window; that was the only one open. But, why, I ask myself. Why did it go out? That was just what we wanted it to do. I wonder whether it is up to some devilish trick. The thing can think with a certain animal cunning. We must shut and lock the living-room window and go out at the door. What trick has that thing in store, I wonder? What damnable trick?'

'How are we going to find an abstract hate in this maze of shadows?' Terry wanted to know.

'It is more than abstract,' said the doctor seriously. 'Having broken into our plane of existence, this thing has achieved, as you have already felt, a certain state of semi-materialization. A ponderable substance has formed round the nucleus of malignant intelligence. As long as it can draw upon human energy from its victim, that material substance will remain. In moving from place to place, it must make a certain amount of noise. And, drawing its physical energy from this particular sick man, it must cough as he does. In a good light, even in this bright moonlight, it will be, to a certain extent, visible.'

But no rustlings and scurryings fled before their flashlights amongst the ornamental evergreens; no furtive shadow flitted across moonlight patches; no sense of hate hung in the darkest corners.

'I hope to God it didn't give us the slip and sneak in again before we got the entries fixed. But no, I'm sure it wasn't in the house. I wish I could guess what tricks it's up to.' The doctor was more worried than he cared to let his friend see. He was convinced that leaving the house had been a deliberate move on the thing's part and he wished that he might fathom whatever cunning purpose lay back of that move.

All of a sudden the sound of footsteps impinged upon their ears; faint shuffling. Both men tensed to listen, and they could hear the steps coming nearer. The doctor shook his head.

'It's just some countryman trudging home along the road. If he sees us with flashlights at this hour he'll raise a howl of burglars, no doubt.'

The footsteps approached ploddingly behind the fence, one of those nine-foot high ornamental screens made of split chestnut saplings that are so prevalent around country houses. Presently the dark figure of the man—Terry was quite relieved to see that it was a man—passed before the open gate, and the footsteps trudged on behind the tall barrier.

Fifty feet, a hundred feet; the crunch of heavy nailed boots was growing fainter. Then something rustled amongst the bushes. Terry caught at the doctor's sleeve. 'There! My God! There again!'

A crouching something ran with incredible speed along this side of the fence after the unsuspecting footsteps of the other. In the patches of moonlight between black shadows it was easily distinguishable. It came abreast with the retreating footsteps and suddenly it jumped. Without preparation or take-off, apparently without effort, the swiftly scuttling thing shot itself into the air.

Both men saw a ragged-edged form, as that of an incredibly tall and thin man with an abnormally tiny head, clear the nine-foot fence with bony knees drawn high and attenuated ape arms flung wide; an opium eater's nightmare silhouetted against the dim sky. And then it was gone.

In the instant that they stood rooted to the spot, a shriek of inarticulate terror rose from the road. There was a spurt of flying gravel, a mad plunging of racing footsteps, more shrieks, the last rising to the high-pitched falsetto of the acme of fear. Then a lurching fall and an awful silence.

'Good God!' The doctor was racing for the gate, Terry after him. A hundred feet down the road a dark mass huddled on the

ground; there was not a sign of anything else. The misshapen shadow had vanished. The man on the ground rolled limp, giving vent to great gulping moans. The doctor lifted his shoulders against his own knee.

'Keep a look-out, Jimmy,' he warned. His deft hands were exploring for a hurt or wound, while his rapid fire of comments gave voice to his findings. 'What damned luck! Still, I don't see what it could have done to a sturdy lout like this. How could we have guarded against this sort of a mischance? Though it just couldn't have crashed into this fellow's vitality so suddenly; there doesn't seem to be anything wrong, anyhow. I guess he's more scared than hurt.'

The moaning hulk of a man squirmed and opened his eyes. Feeling himself in the grip of hands, he let out another fearful yell and struggled in a frenzy to escape.

'Easy, brother, easy,' the doctor said soothingly. 'You're all right. Get a hold of yourself.'

The man shuddered convulsively. Words babbled from his sagging lips. 'It-it-its ha-hand! Oh, G—God—over my face. A h-hand like an eel—a dead ee-eel. Ee-eel'

He went off into a high-pitched hysteria again.

There was a sound of windows opening up at the house and a confused murmur of anxious voices; then a hail.

'What is it? Who's there? What's the matter?'

'Lord help the fools!' The doctor dropped the man cold in the road and sprang across to the other side from where he could look over the high fence and see the square of patches of light from the windows high up on their little hill.

'Back!' he screamed. 'Get back! For God's sake, shut those windows!' He waved his hands and jumped down in an agony of apprehension. 'What?' The fatuous query floated down to him. 'What's that you say?'

Another square of light suddenly sprang out of the looming mass, from the sick man's room. Laboriously the window went up, and the sick man leaned out.

'What?' he asked, and he coughed out into the night.

'God Almighty! Come on, Jimmy! Leave that fool; he's only scared.' The doctor shouted and dashed off on the long sprint back to the gate and up the sloping shrubbery to the house that he had thought to leave so well guarded.

'That's its trick,' he panted as he ran. 'That's why it came out. Please Providence we won't come too late. But it's got the start on us, and it can move ten times as fast.'

Together they burst through the front door, slammed it after

them, and thundered up the stairs. The white, owlish faces of the Jarrett family gleamed palely at them from their door. The doctor cursed them for fools as he dashed past. He tore at the knob of the sick-room door.

The door did not budge.

Frantically he wrestled with it. It held desperately solid.

'Bolted from the inside!' The doctor screamed. 'The fool must have done it himself. Open up in there. Quick! Open for your life.'

The door remained cold and dead. Only from inside the room came the familiar hacking cough. It came in a choking fit. And then Terry's blood ebbed in a chill wave right down to his feet.

For *there were two coughs*. A ghastly chorus of rasping and retching in a hell's paroxysm.

The doctor ran back the length of the hall. Pushing off from the further wall, he dashed across and crashed his big shoulders against the door. Like petty nails the bolt screws flew and he staggered in, clutching the sagging door for support.

The room was in heavy darkness. The doctor clawed wildly along the wall for the unfamiliar light switch. Terry, at his heels, felt the wave of malevolence that met them.

The sudden light revealed to their blinking eyes the sick man, limp, inert, lying where he had been hurled, half in and half out of the bed, twisted in a horrible paroxysm.

The window was open, as the wretched dupe had left it when he poked his foolish head out into the night to inquire about all the hubbub outside. Above the corner of the sill, hanging outside, was a horror that drew both men up short. An abnormally long angle of raggy elbow supported a smudgy, formless, yellow face of incredible evil that grinned malignant triumph out of an absurdly infantile head.

The face dropped out of sight. Only hate, like a tangible thing, pervaded the room. From twenty feet below came back to the trembling men a grating, 'Och-och-och, ha-ha-ha-heh-heh-heck, och—och.' It retreated down the shrubbery.

Dr. Muncing stood a long minute in choked silence. Then bitterly he swore. Slowly, with incisive grimness he said, 'Man's ingenuity can guard against everything except the sheer dumb stupidity of man.'

It was morning. Dr. Muncing was taking his leave. He was leaving behind him a few last words of advice. They were not gentle.

'I shall say no more about the criminal stupidity of opening your windows after my warning to you; perhaps the thing was able to influence all of you. Your brother, madam, has paid the price.'

Through your fault and his, there is now loose, somewhere in our world, an elemental entity, malignant and having sufficient human energy to continue. Where or how, I cannot say. It may turn up in the next town, it may do so in China; or something may happen to dissipate it.

'As far as you are concerned it is through. It has tapped this source of energy and has gone on. It will not come back, unless you, madam, go out of your way deliberately to attract it by fooling with these silly seances before you have learned a lot more about them than you know now.'

Mrs. Jarrett was penitent and very wholesomely frightened, besides. She would never play with fire again, she vowed; she would have nothing at all to do with it ever again; she would be glad if the doctor would take away her ouija board and her planchette and all her notebooks; everything. She was afraid of them; she felt that some horrible influence still attached to them.

'Notebooks?' The doctor was interested. 'You mean you took notes of the babble that came through? Let me see. Hm-m, the usual stuff; projected reversal of your own conceptions of the hereafter and how happy all your relatives are there. Ha, what's this? Numbers, numbers—twelve, twenty-four, eight—all the bad combinations of numbers. What perversity made you think only of bad numbers? Hello, hello, what—From where did you get this recurring ten, five, eight, one, fourteen? A whole page of it. And here again. And here; eighteen, one, ten? Pages and pages—and a lot of worse ones here? How did this come?'

Mrs. Jarrett was tearful and appeared somewhat hesitant.

'They just came through like that, Doctor. They kept on coming. We just wrote them down.'

The doctor was very serious. A thin whistle formed in his pursed lips. His eyes were dark pools of wonder.

'There are more things in heaven and earth—' He muttered. Then shaking off the awe that had come over him, he turned to Mrs. Jarrett.

'My dear lady,' he said. 'I apologize about those open windows. This thing was able to project its influence from even the other side of the veil. *It made you invite it.* Don't ask me to explain these mysteries. But listen to what you have been playing with.' The doctor paused to let his words soak in.

'These numbers, translated into their respective letters, are the beginning of an ancient *Hindoo Yogi spell to invoke a devil*. Merciful heaven, how many things we don't understand. So that's how it came through. And there is no Yogi spell to send it back. We shall probably meet again, that thing and I.'

Roz Branson

EPILOGUE

I went back to see *Rosemary's Baby* the other night. I had to go back; I mean, everyone does. Not to go back, not to look again, not to figure it out is commensurate with saying, a few years ago, you hadn't read Sallinger, or this year, Tolkien.

Sitting there in the dark watching, I felt the same sense of dissatisfaction. The truth is I simply do not believe or accept the ending of *Rosemary's Baby*.

In case you have forgotten, or never knew, here's how the last reel of the film stacks up.

Rosemary, having been raped by her husband, poisoned by next-door neighbours who raise exotic milk drinks in the kitchen, double-crossed by one doctor and bilked by another, gives birth to a child who vanishes, reported dead.

Hearing a baby cry beyond her bedroom wall, she breaks into the next apartment where she finds husband, neighbours, doctor, and the child: Satan Reborn amidst festivities and a happy cry of 'God is dead!'

Though Rosemary carries with her a fine sharp carving knife, she does nothing with it. When asked to shush and rock the blasphemous child, she does so. Fade out. THE END.

Nonsense. Also: balderdash.

On a purely paranoid level, the woman would have to kill someone: her husband, a neighbour who poisoned her, a doctor who lied to her, or the baby itself.

If we take the film on a non-psychological level, as pure fantasy, it still doesn't work. In severe shock, sorely put upon by a witch's gaggle of villains, you don't sit down amidst panic to rock a nightmare.

What then should the ending of *Rosemary's Baby* be?

I dare to offer the following:

CLOSE-UP: Rosemary, knife in hand, frozen in the midst of the satanic jubilee.

She approaches the cradle where the strange and terrible child stirs.

Everyone gasps. What will she do?

Kill the child? Attack her husband or one of them?

No. She drops the knife, seizes the babe in her arms and whirls. Is she going to throw the child out of the window?

No. She runs out of the door, into the elevator, and down into the street. The Satanists pursue, fearful and shouting.

A light drizzling rain is falling at dusk in New York. No thunder, no lightning; no Gothic super-effects, just a soft drizzle through which Rosemary runs, shielding her babe from the rain, and behind, the devil-pack in full cry.

She turns, runs, turns again, down alleys, up streets, until at last she reaches a church or (why not?) a cathedral.

In she runs!

The Satanists gather at every door, on all sides. Afraid to enter, they hover on the sills, soaked by rain, faces dripping, peering in at:

Rosemary, who runs up the main aisle of the cathedral, reaches the great altar, and stops, unveiling the child.

What will she do now?

The worshippers of evil watch from every door. The rain whispers on the cold stones.

Rosemary steps upon the altar platform and holds the baby out and up in the air and at last, eyes shut, gathers courage to speak. And this is what she says:

'O Lord, O God, O Lord God. Take back your Son!'

Silence. Rain.

Pull the camera back slowly, and up into the high reaches of the cathedral where we can see Rosemary and her baby on the altar, praying, waiting, and, in every door, cold and rain-drenched, the demon people.

Fade to black. **THE END.**

And that, my friends, is the way *Rosemary's Baby* should have ended.

Which then would have sent audiences out into the night to think what kind of an idea had just run over them.

Which would have sent everyone home to crack the Old Testament or probe through *Paradise Lost* after Milton's Dark Angel.

You think not? Well, I think so. How can you resist such a delicious concept? How could one go to sleep that night without tracking down the Devil's genealogy?

For after all, wasn't there a time, billions of æons ago, when Lucifer stood by the Throne of God? Was he not an accepted Angel? Was he not one of the Sons? And, at one time, did he not dare to use his intelligence and power, testing God? And in so doing, was he not cast out of Heaven and hurled to the fiery pit to sweat out the millennia? All this he was, all this he did, all this he suffered.

And, finally, then, does not God forgive? And a dark-hooved child brought by a blameless and sore-tried mother onto a cathedral altar on a rainy night: could God refuse such needful prayers? Would not the Lord take back his ancient enemy and make of him once more a Son upon the right hand of the Throne?

There is my script, my new and inevitable FINIS. Film it in your mind. Screen it on your eyelids tonight.

Then turn and walk out of the cinema, the cathedral, with me.

Leaving Rosemary there, with her sad child, waiting for answers, which must come.

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